RAMPARTS

SEPTEMBER·1962

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RAMPARTS

THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC JOURNAL

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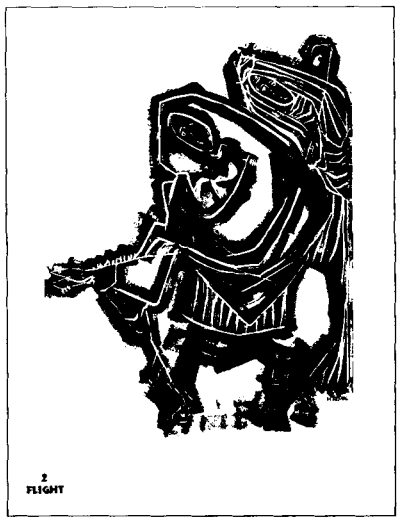

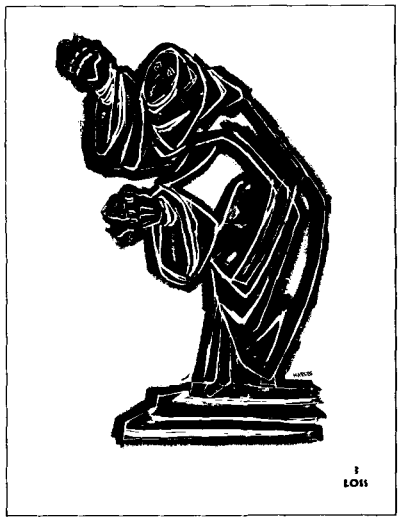

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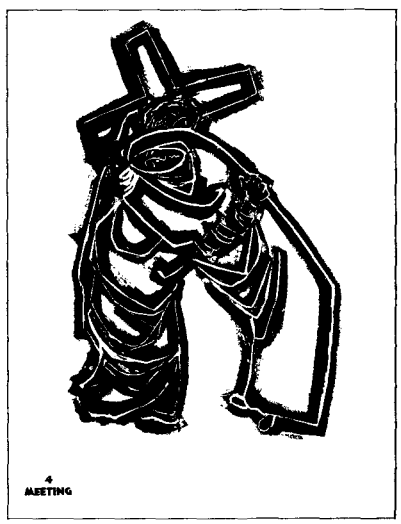

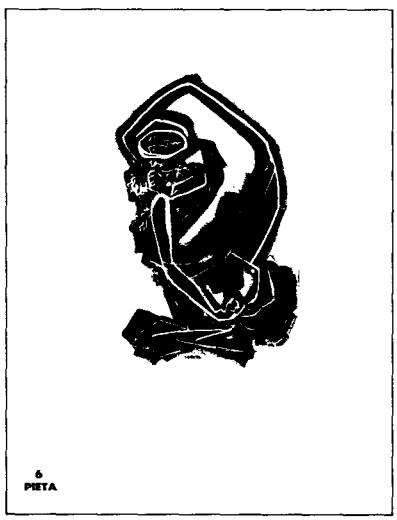

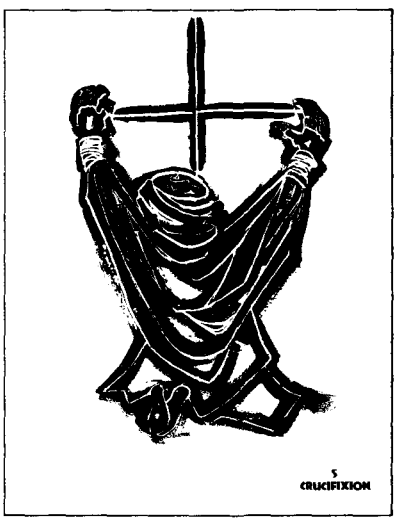

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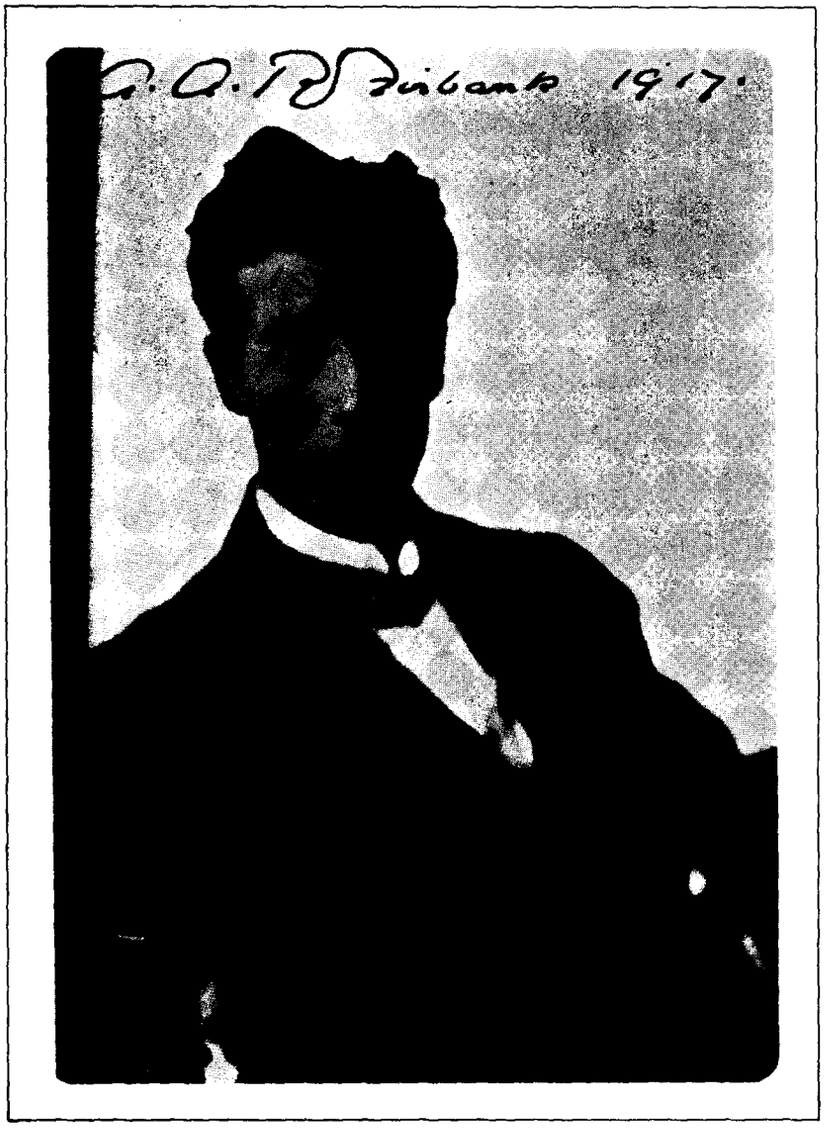
Ronald Firbank

1886–1926



by

Neville Braybrooke

NEVILLE BRAYBROOKE *was born in London in 1923, and at the age of sixteen he became Editor of the literary quarterly,* The Wind and The Rain. *He edited* A Symposium For T. S. Eliot *(1958) on the occasion of Eliot's seventieth birthday, and he has published several books on London* (London in Colour *and* London Green), *a Christmas miscellany,* A Partridge in a Pear Tree *(1960), and a novel,* The Idler *(1961). He lives in London with his wife, the novelist, Isobel English, and he is currently working on a critical biography of Ronald Firbank.*

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"Claude Harvester was usually considered charming. He had gone about here and there, tinting his personality after the fashion of Venetian glass. Certainly he had wandered . . . He had been to Arcadia, even, a place where artificial temperaments so seldom get—their nearest approach being perhaps, a matinée of The Winter's Tale. *Many, indeed, thought him interesting. He had groped so . . . In the end he began to suspect that what he had been seeking for all along was the theatre. He had discovered the truth in writing plays. In style—he was often called obscure, although, in reality, he was as charming as the top of an apple-tree above a wall. As a novelist he was almost successful. His books were waited for . . . but without impatience."*

How prophetic that was in 1915—the year in which Lawrence brought out *The Rainbow*, and *The Catholic Anthology* launched Eliot's "Prufrock" poem. For Claude Harvester was none other than Ronald Firbank disguised in "gold trailing skirts." It is a self-portrait hard to beat, and it appears in *Vainglory*, the first of his novels to be published. Today it stands as a key passage, holding all the clues: the wanderlust engendered by early childhood travels; the passion for masqued balls and theatricals; the pleasure taken in dressing-up—tinting the personality as well as the nails; the pursuit of Arcadian no less than Athenian society; the desire to be thought perpetually young, interesting and charming. To bore was the only sin. Yet coupled with that perpetual ambition to be thought as charming as the top of an apple-tree, went a dual desire both to hide behind the garden wall as well as peep over it. When shyness and boldness go together they frequently lead to scenes of "outrageous" behaviour, such outrages becoming the delight of the gossip-columnist. Friends remember Firbank's peculiar habits in restaurants—hiding under the table for example, or refusing to eat more than one pea or grape. Once in London at the Eiffel Tower Restaurant in Percy Street, a tough, baseball-playing American found himself put out of countenance by this behaviour. "I guess I'll have something t'eat," he said aggressively to the waiter. "What will you have sir?" asked the waiter. "A rump-steak." He pored over the menu. "Yes, sir?" "And carrots." "Yes, sir?" "And boiled potatoes." "Yes, sir?" "And - And - Er - Er . . ." "Oh! violets," came Firbank's high-pitched voice from another corner of the room.* I do not think that the author would have considered his behaviour outrageous on this occasion. Instead, he would prefer to have called it "orchidaceous." He would probably have been correct.

These and a hundred more anecdotes have become the treasured memories of his friends, who have told and re-told them in their various memoirs. But there are other moments in a writer's own fiction when the outrageous (as opposed to the orchidaceous) can lead to moments of either obscenity or blasphemy—or both; and such instances offend not because they bore but because they are in Bad Taste. Firbank is not without such blots, and early in this essay I make this point as an antidote to some of the wild untutored eulogies which have recently met the issue of the first complete edition of his works. His voice can be heard from the Milky Way: "How I hate the untutored. They are *so* naked."

Firbank died in 1926 at the age of forty. When he published *Vainglory* he was twenty-nine. For several years it had been his custom to write his sketches and stories on large blue postcards, and, since his handwriting sprawled so, often he could squeeze no more than ten words to a side. These postcards were filled with phrases and sentences—some descriptive of things ("a mitred napkin"); some descriptive of people ("Miss Daw-

*Several variations on this story appear in the writings of Nancy Cunard, Osbert Sitwell and others. I take my version from Wyndham Lewis's *Blasting and Bombardeering* (1932).

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kins explored a sauce-boat as though it [were] an Orient liner"); and some descriptive of places ("Spain! The most glorious country in God's universe. His admitted masterpiece, His gem..."). Alternatively if he overheard snatches of conversation or *faux pas* that pleased him ("He doesn't tip. He *rewards*"; "the brainy district of Cuna-Cuna"), he would set them down and file them away for the right moment. The right moment and *le mot juste* were inseparable in his mind. So out of these postcards he designed and orchestrated his books, piecing them together like mosaics or using a kind of word-music in which there was a continual counterpoint between the romantic and the self-mocking. Hence it is impossible to be dogmatic, in an absolute sense, about the order of his books; some paragraphs of *Cardinal Pirelli* (1924) may quite easily have been written before *Vainglory*. Certainly *The Artificial Princess*, published posthumously in 1934, was completed before 1915. But it was a short book, a third of the length of *Vainglory*, and only famous authors can afford to publish short books. The manuscript was left in a drawer, and the author was still deliberating whether to submit it at the time of his death in Rome. Throughout his work, therefore, the same phrases echo and recur—but often with added artistry: in *The Artificial Princess* the King is described as "a tired Viking"—a rather feeble pun; in *The Flower Beneath the Foot* (1923) the King is described much more amusingly as "a tired pastry cook." In *The Artificial Princess* the sky over the Wellan hills is "powdered *all over* with poudre de riz"; in *Vainglory* the sky above Vigo Street is "powdered *completely* with poudre de riz" (my italics in each example).

Yet even *The Artificial Princess* is not really Firbank's first book.* In 1905, before he went up to Cambridge, he published *Odette d'Antrevernes* together with a sketch called *A Study in Temperament*. Later, he referred to all his novels as "Studies in Temperament," and it is worth glancing at a passage from this first sketch:

> "I think I shall dye my hair *very* gradually to red," she said. "I am so tired of gold; of course those yellow tea-roses match beautifully, but I think that yellow is becoming monotonous!"
>
> She got up and went to a little table covered with books, and picked up a small volume bound in grey. "A touch of grey will improve my dress," she thought...
>
> Lady Agnes opened the book, and found it was one of Maeterlinck's plays.
>
> "It is so delightful to be seen reading Maeterlinck! So decadent!..."

This is true Firbatia—if I may coin the term. It sounds the beginning of that authentic mocking tone which was to strike louder with the years, although at the beginning there was a second more romantic tone whose echo was never to be quite lost. *Valmouth* (originally announced by Grant Richards as "Glenmouth") is sub-titled "A Romantic Novel," and there are "cognac-colored" clouds above Hare Hatch House in it; and in the same blue and pink *cahiers* as *A Study in Temperament* first appeared, there is also included *Odette d'Antrevernes* which is sub-titled "A Fairy Tale for Weary People."

ODETTE IS "A WEE MITE" living in a great chateau on the Loire. An aged curé tells her the story of Bernadette and the Beautiful Lady whom she saw in the rock, and she decides that she too, like Bernadette, will seek out "the Holy Mary, the Mother of the Lord Seigneur." So one night she steals down from her nursery, creeps through the ancestral hall "with its torn and faded flags that drooped like dead things," slips into the rose garden and there picks an enormous bouquet of the best blooms to offer to the Beautiful Lady. Suddenly the sound of a low groan startles her. She jumps to her feet. "Could it be that the Holy Mother was in pain?" She looks about her but sees no one; instinct compels her to run down the avenue of limes and there, by the river's edge, she discovers a woman with painted cheeks and flaming hair. "What are you doing in your nightgown...? You've begun early, my dear!" "Who are you?" the child insists. "Who are you?" Then far away in the East, with a true theatrical tinting,

*Those interested in Firbank's juvenilia, including a novel called *Lila* which he wrote when he was ten, are referred to "Ronald Firbank in Periodicals" by Miriam J. Benkowitz. This article appeared in *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* (Volume 54, Part 4).

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the day begins to dawn; the innocence of the little girl re-awakens the lost innocence of the woman. "I must go . . . I am going to try and find work—honest work." As they part, the child prays: "Take into Thy protection, dear Mother, this poor woman who has need of Thee, and bring her safely to Thy Beautiful Kingdom in Heaven, for the sake of Our Lord Jesus. Amen."

It has become a fashion to decry this fairy tale; to summon up the ghost of Maeterlinck and murmur with Lady Agnes, "So decadent." It is so tempting to smile at the crimson roses that glisten in the morning sun like drops of blood, or at the church that loomed like a ripe apricot against the evening sky. It is so easy to dismiss the whole thing as juvenilia. Yet the fact remains that Firbank saw fit to reprint it in the same year as he brought out *Inclinations*—namely, 1916. *A Study in Temperament* was dropped (and has subsequently never been reprinted), but the "Fairy Tale for Weary People" was reprinted, with four Beardsleyesque drawings, under the abbreviated title of *Odette*. As *Odette d'Antrevernes* it had originally appeared under the name of Arthur Firbank. But to the ear, Arthur does not go well with Firbank, whereas Ronald, his third Christian name, strikes the ideal musical counterpoint. "The name Arthur is horrid," he had written to one friend who had wrongly addressed an envelope and knew nothing of his more recent literary activities. To another friend who said "Goodnight, Firbank" as he hailed a cab, he had complained: "I wish you wouldn't call me 'Firbank'—it gives me a sense of goloshes." How well these two incidents recall that if he was a late child of the *mauve epoque*, he was also a contemporary of Virginia Woolf, since, biographically no less than stylistically, they mark the difference between an affection for words and an affectation with words.

So, in 1916, Ronald Firbank emerged as the author of three books—*Vainglory*, *Odette* and *Inclinations*. But why this sandwiching of *Odette?* Why this unexpected enthusiasm for this early pastiche—an enthusiasm which did not last out the war since by the armistice he was declaring that *Vainglory* was his first book? Once, this provided a puzzle for collectors of first editions; now, with the complete edition of his works at hand, it still provides a puzzle for critics. I believe that an explanation can be reached by an indirect clue that lies in his reaction to one of the 1916 reviews which met *Inclinations*: "[Mr. Firbank's] new book is pleasant, vivacious and stimulating," wrote *The Glasgow Herald*. "Stimulating to what?" retorted the author. Precisely. That remains as challenging a question now as it did then.

"I once met him . . . He told me writing books was by no means easy," he makes one of his characters say. In fact he wrote because he was compelled to, because like all writers subject to this daemon—romantics, fantasists or fictionists (William Plomer's word for Firbank)—he is, though outwardly a comic writer, a much more serious author than it is common to assume. Often friends, even close friends, would notice that he would look shyly away, and similarly there is reflected in his prose a great many sideway glances. A reader must be prepared to heed Polonius's advice and by indirection find direction out. There are singularly few direct statements, and "Beware of a facile Moral" warns another of his characters.

But in *Odette* there is to be found one direct statement—not especially memorably phrased—which provides, I suspect, a key to all his work. It is to be discovered on the final page.

> "Then little Odette returned thoughtful to the great grey chateau . . . [She] felt somehow changed since she last passed the castle gates. She felt older. For suddenly she realized that Life was not a dream; she realized for the first time that Life was cruel, that Life was sad, that beyond the beautiful garden in which she dwelt, many millions of people were struggling to live, and sometimes in the struggle one failed—like the poor woman by the river bank."

Beyond the garden there is Life with a capital L; but behind the garden wall the author is safe in the branches of an apple tree—an ideal position both for disguise and as an observation-post. Or to change the metaphor, perhaps it can be said that at heart Firbank longed to be bold enough to be serious like Maeterlinck, but was forced by the shyness of his nature to play the comedian. And by playing the comedian, which is better

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than being too shy to play at all, he was able to revel in his love of theatricals and dressing-up, variations of which occur in all his novels. From boyhood, moreover, he had nourished the ambition of becoming a successful dramatist. *Odette d'Antrevernes* had been followed by his play, *The Mauve Tower*, the unprinted typescript of which is now to be found in the Berg Collection at the New York Public Library. In his 1930 *Memoir of Ronald Firbank* Ifan Kyrle Fletcher recalls having read it and remembers it showing, only too clearly, both the author's indebtedness to Maeterlinck "and his love of touching in scenes, as though with heavy dabs of pigment." Yet the novels from *Vainglory* to *Cardinal Pirelli* are made up almost entirely of dialogue—like plays; and the prose descriptions, in many instances, no more than set the scenes or introduce the characters. Why, then, did he fail to achieve his ambition as a serious dramatist?

CLAUDE HARVESTER was a dramatist—and *Vainglory* provides the answer:

> " 'Who is . . . talking to that gorgeous thing . . . in the gold trailing skirts?' "
>
> " 'You mean Claude Harvester. His play the other night was a disaster. Did you see it?' "
>
> " 'It was delightfully slight, I thought.' "
>
> " 'A disaster!' "

A few pages later comes the explanation for its disaster. There was no plot, "no plot exactly." How revealing that last adverb is, since its plot, when revealed, can be summed up in one line: "It's about two women who live all alone." Similar one-sentence synopses can be provided for all the other novels, beginning with *Vainglory* in which Mrs. Shamefoot wants to see herself immortalized in stained glass whilst still alive. In *Inclinations* Miss Collins wants to find true love in the shape of an Italian count, whereas her elderly companion Miss O'Brookomore wants to find it in the shape of Miss Collins. In *Caprice* (1917) Miss Sinquier wants to leave her cathedral close and seek fame on the London boards. In *Valmouth* (1918) a group of centenarians want consolation and look for it in Catholicism and exoticism, and sometimes confuse the two. In *The Princess Zoubaroff* (1920), his one published play, the characters of the opposite sex want to have nothing to do with each other. In *Santal* (1921) Cherif wants to leave his village and seek Allah. In *The Flower Beneath the Foot* (1923) Laura de Nazianzi wants to marry Prince Youssef, but has to transmute her love into mysticism and is subsequently canonized. In *Sorrow in Sunlight* Mrs. Mouth wants the glamour of the big city and "a Villa with a watercloset." In *Cardinal Pirelli*—well again it is a matter of "no plot exactly," but just a series of scenes built round ecclesiastical life. Inevitably the final scene is the Cardinal's death, which occurs after he has chased a choir boy "up and down, in and out, round and round 'the Virgin,' over the worn tombed paving, through Saint Joseph . . . and along the raised tribunes of the choiresters and the echoing coro . . ." And the last sentence of the book reads as he lies dead beneath the great fane: "Above him stirred the windblown banners in the Nave."

IT IS A REMINDER of the "torn and faded flags that drooped like dead things" above Odette. It is a long journey back—over seven hundred pages by the printed text, and over twenty years in the author's life; and it is a journey back from sophistication to simplicity, from the self-mockery of Pirelli who, like Harvester, adored disguises but disliked forgoing the military bravura of the skirt, to the romantic portrait of "the wee mite" overshadowed by the great chateau on the Loire. The portraits of Odette and Pirelli are both holy pictures, but the first belongs to the repository art of the Nineties, the other to the age of impressionism. For the chase of the choirboy Chicklet, the hints of lesbian parishioners and the suggestion of monastic whippings—these, in Pirelli, all belong to the tradition of shocking. They appear not so much moral depravities as the essence of Nineties naughtiness. They are stimulating to what? To further giggles about hair-shirts, disciplines and . . . A critic is forced to employ the very dots on which Firbank himself so often fell back. To go further would be Bad Taste. For it is a large measure of Firbank's lasting achievement that he knew the precise boundaries. Could any but the most bigoted take offence at

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this brief life of hagiography, with its shades of John Aubrey and William Beckford?

> "One day St. Automona di Meris seeing a young novice yawning suddenly spat into her mouth and that without malice or thought of mischief. Some ninety hours afterwards, the said younger novice brought into the world the Blessed St. Elizabeth Bathilde, who by dint of skipping changed her sex at the age of forty and became a man."

It has the same delightful tone of innocent fantasy as when a Sister of the Flaming-Hood asks for a copy of *Inclinations* at the local library in Pisuerga and is told that it is out. "Maladetta," she exclaims and instead of the customary dots there follow four Maltese crosses. Or there is the comedy built out of killing any possible innuendo with the most unexpected and yet direct of statements:

> "Perhaps of the many charges brought against the Primate by his traducers, that of making the sign of the cross with his left foot at meals was the most utterly unfounded—looking for a foot-cushion would have been nearer the truth."

As the author once exclaimed: "Oh the charm and the flavour of the religious world! where match it for variety and interest!" Alas! in the perpetual search for variety and interest, there were moments when boredom set in; when the puns about women and Roman bulls became too obvious when the suggestions about massage and the off-stage screams of "O-o-o-h?" and "Ouch!!" went too far, and when sentences hovered dangerously over the territory of Bad Taste. "Imagine the world, my friends, had Christ been born a girl." That is a case in point; the love of dressing-up has overstepped the bounds of Good Taste. But since Firbank always hovered above the surface of things he had no sooner touched the ground of Bad Taste than he had flown away. This may explain why both E. M. Forster and Arthur Waley have suggested that he is as hard to pinion as a butterfly.

In *Sorrow in Sunlight* when Charlie Mouth is questioned at the frontier, he finds that he has nothing to declare except butterflies. "Exempt of duty. Pass." Later, he sees the big city of Cuna-Cuna entirely in terms of butterflies:

> "So many sparkling fans. One, a delicate mauve one: 'Shucks! If only you we' butterflies!' he breathed, contemplating with avidity the nonchalant throng; then perceiving a richer specimen splashed with silver of the same amative tint: 'Oh you lil beauty!' And clutching his itching net to his heart, he regretfully withdrew."

Maybe in the whirr of those wings Charlie Mouth saw in Cuna-Cuna what its author had seen ten years before in the bedroom of Miss Compostella when a sudden whirr came from "an unconcerned Sèvre shepherdess"—a description re-echoed at Totterdown Junction when there is a similar whirring pause just long enough for an angel, "flying slowly," to pass by. Charlie Mouth is a romantic innocent like Odette, whereas Miss Compostella is a sophisticated actress who mixes with Claude Harvester. The Sèvre shepherdess and the slow flying angel—they fuse that romanticism and self-mockery, that boldness and shyness to be found in Claude Harvester's *alter ego*—the creator of Mrs. Shamefoot and Miss Compostella no less than Odette and St. Laura de Nazianzi.

THREE YEARS AFTER HE HAD WRITTEN *Odette d'Antrevernes*, Arthur Annesley Ronald Firbank was received into the Catholic Church at Cambridge. He was twenty-two at the time. Scarcely anything is known about his religious life, though it has been rumoured that, like the Hon. "Eddie" Monteith in *The Flower Beneath the Foot*, he wanted to become a Jesuit. His failure to do so—or rather his failure to gain acceptance by the Order (also rumoured), may account for his later comment to Lord Berners: "The Church of Rome wouldn't have me and so I laugh at her." For Firbank was an invert, and such men are often doomed to rigours of loneliness far surpassing the austerities of the cell. To them others beckon . . . but seldom touch, if Claude Harvester may thus be paraphrased.

Most men begin thinking seriously about matrimony after their middle twenties; Firbank was in his middle thirties when he published *The Flower Beneath the Foot* and many of his friends had married—and in some cases, with their marriages, he had become lost to them. It is noticeable that

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the last three books, beginning with *The Flower Beneath the Foot*, all end on a more tragic—or should I say?—serious note. From the convent walls Laura de Nazianzi has to witness Prince Youssef's marriage to Princess Elsie; in a footnote the reader is told that she was subsequently canonized, and in the first edition (and inexcusably omitted from *The Complete Ronald Firbank*) there are two maxims attributed to her as a Saint which stand as epigraphs to the book: "Some girls are born organically good: I wasn't." As maxims they are in the same vein as the thumbnail sketch of St. Automona di Meris in *Valmouth*, but they strike a profounder note; the comedy of religious fantasy has grown much nearer to the tragi-comedy of self-autobiography.

In the closing pages of *Sorrow in Sunlight** Mimi Mouth joins a religious procession. They sing:

> "*Time like an ever-rolling stream,*
> *Bears all its sons away;*
> *They fly forgotten, as a dream*
> *Dies at the opening day.*"

Mimi's betrothed has been destroyed in an earthquake—and her sister could not care less. Edna watches the procession with indifference as she relaxes in the warm, secure arms of her own dandy lover. Yet it is somehow suggested that Edna will meet with a Bad End. *Sorrow in Sunlight* has something of the air of a Caribbean religious fiesta about it, and in Charlie's pursuit of butterflies Firbank may be holding up the carnival masque of Death to his own face. For Charlie feels for Mimi. He too has been made aware of the passing of things by the earthquake.

> " 'Mizzable sinner, Lord. You heah, Sah. You heah me say dat. Oh! Jesus, Jesus, Jesus,' and weeping he threw himself down among a bed of flowers."

As once in CLAUDE HARVESTER, so now the author finds, in turn, an *alter ego* in Laura de Nazianzi; Charlie Mouth; and His Eminence Cardinal Pirelli. (Maybe my pen was more accurate when it ran away and wrote *later ego*). In the spring days of *Vainglory* the author could afford to mock himself; and a few years later with the security of five books behind him, he could continue to be bolder still: "This Ronald Firbank I can't take to at all . . . Was there ever a novel more coarse [than *Valmouth*]?" Even in *Sorrow in Sunlight* he can present himself as: "Ronald Firbank (a dingy lilac blossom of rarity untold)". Yet sooner or later there would have to be an end to this self-mocking; the blossom on the lilac, no less than the blossom on the apple-tree, would fall. The nails of the fingers might still be stained with carmine, but there would be old age to be faced, an increase in loneliness, a drying up of the skin, and a final hardening of the arteries. In the end self-mockery could provide no more than another form of disguise—like dressing-up. The centenarians in *Valmouth* cannot expect to reach the age of two hundred, and Firbank himself, who always had a terror of his youthful looks fading, was mercifully released from that terrifying calamity —"my forty-first year." Cardinal Pirelli might be dressed in all the purpleship and pomp of the Church, but at the most it was a temporal authority of some ten to twenty years. From the beginning there was the realization—even in Odette's rose-garden—that Life was cruel, that Life was sad. In the interim men laughed at life as best they might, knowing that as some had died of exposure on the Loire others had been choked in Renaissance courts by their own wine. There had to be observed a moderation in all things. Hills could not exist without valleys, nor fairy tales without angels. A last fling would be stimulating to what?

In one sense, *Concerning the Eccentricities of Cardinal Pirelli*, was a last fling. No previous book had been outwardly more profane and no previous book inwardly so serious. In it there are more direct statements than any other, even when the shadows of such statements fall fleetingly across the page—like those of a passing butterfly or angel. "Men . . . the eternal hunters, novelty seekers, insatiable beings"; "Men with their selfishness, fickleness and lies"; "Women with their prettiness, vanity and . . ." The famous dots; the swerving away. The longest direct passage is the

* In England and America today *Sorrow in Sunlight* is reprinted under the title of *Prancing Nigger*. I prefer to keep to its original title. Firbank himself always regretted having permitted the other title to be used.

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most strange in the whole book, indeed in the whole body of his work. The Primate has fled the capital to a deserted monastery:

> "The forsaken splendour of the vast closed cloisters seemed almost to augur the waning of a cult. Likewise the decline of Apollo, Diana, Isis, with the gradual downfall of their temples, had been heralded, in past times, by the dispersal of their priests. It looked as though Mother Church, like Venus or Diana, was making way in due turn for the beliefs that should follow: 'and we shall begin with intolerance, martyrdom and converts,' the Cardinal ruminated, pausing before the ancient fresco depicting the eleven thousand virgins, or as many as there was room for."

Firbank may not have been able to keep a smile from breaking across his face at the idea of "the eleven thousand virgins," but the earlier sentiments are certainly stimulating. But to what? Pirelli is a Renaissance figure, and Clemenza is a Renaissance cathedral. Has, then, the Church of Rome a need in every age to return to the catacombs to be cleansed of its pomps? Is this what he is saying? History would seem to endorse it. So there remains the paradox that the last book which in a true Renaissance style was the most bawdy remains in a religious sense the most profound. Had its author lived to see its publication there might have been talk of banning it.* As it was the Home Secretary let it appear unquestioned. The printing was comparatively modest—Grant Richards had reprinted none of the previous novels,—and it seemed unlikely to the Home Office that they would be troubled in this quarter again. In 1926 there were more important matters to be considered; other authors were still alive and kicking. In the same year as *Vainglory* had been published *The Rainbow* had come out and there had been trouble with the police. A vigilant eye must be kept for *The Plumed Serpent*, already announced on another publisher's list.

*In interesting article by Miriam J. Benkowitz on "Ronald Firbank in New York" (*The Bulletin of the New York Public Library*), she points out that, at first at least, "in America . . . [his] novels were more widely reviewed and more carefully considered than they had been in England." The time-lag may have helped, in some cases.

IN HIS LIFETIME RONALD FIRBANK created a legend and when he died there were those who would not believe the news. The circumstances of his death seemed so extraordinary. At first buried in the company of Keats and Shelley in the English Cemetery in Rome, he was later exhumed and reinterred in the Catholic Cemetery of San Lorenzo. In September 1929 Arnold Bennett dismissed Firbank's achievement as that of "an elegant weakling" in *The Evening Standard*. A month later Evelyn Waugh replied with a short enthusiastic appreciation in *Life and Letters*. In the following year Ifan Kyrle Fletcher, with postscripts by Vyvyan Holland, Augustus John and Sir Osbert Sitwell, brought out a distinguished full-length *Memoir*. And so the cult grew. The Rainbow Edition that had drawn forth Bennett's disapproval and won Waugh's approval was reprinted in 1940 for a new generation to whom (as Connolly has pointed out) Firbank was one of the most neglected names. In 1949 there appeared the first of two omnibus editions of five and three novels, and in 1952, thirty-two years after it had been originally written, *The Princess Zoubaroff* was given its first production at the Watergate Theatre, London. Subsequently *Valmouth*, borrowing Cardinal Pirelli for its last act, was turned into a successful musical in London and New York. Today some of his novels are issued as paper-backs, and there is now a *Complete Ronald Firbank* in one volume.*

The complete edition provides an ideal opportunity for flicking through. Addicts will find a new delight every time. "Niggerling" is his word for a little black sambo; it is not in the *English Oxford Dictionary*. Claude Harvester's works may be mentioned in the *Encyclopaedia Brittanica*, but Firbank's are not; nor are they mentioned in the *Concise Cambridge History of Literature*. What did he learn from Shaw? Did Shaw's *Doctor's Dilemma* inspire in him the courage to use his own name in his own novels: "I don't believe in morality. I'm a disciple of Bernard Shaw"? Did the young Noël Coward read *Inclinations:* "I love Finsbury Circus for its Doves . . . I adore

*Duckworth, 42s. New Directions—$7.75.

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the Aspens in Cadogan Square"? When Firbank decided to leave out all that bored him was he conscious of Congreve's *Incognita:* "When I digress I am at that time writing to please myself; when I continue the thread of my story, I write to please the Reader"? Was it by conscious design that one year he rented the palace at Cintra in which Beckford had once lived? These and a score of other questions come to mind. And every rereading will bring forth a score more.

MY EYE HAS BEEN CAUGHT by an obsession with roses. Not a book did he write in which they are not mentioned. Even in *A Study of Temperament*, there occurs: "I don't know which looked the redder, the women or the roses." In *Odette* there are crimson roses "like drops of crimson blood"; in *The Artificial Princess* there are wild roses, pink roses, tinsel roses, light-green roses, Jericho roses and stone-rosettes; in *Vainglory* there are Christmas roses, rambler roses and red roses—a Faun is crowned with roses, and the silver chimes of the cathedral clock are compared to the petals falling from a rose; in *Inclinations* there are black Scotch roses, sugar-crystal roses and mauve rosettes; in *Caprice* the hedges are alive with roses; in *Valmouth* Lady Parvula de Panzoust wears a hat of rose-pink feathers, and Lady Lucy's blood is described as "nothing but rose-water"; in *The Flower Beneath the Foot* the ladies of the Court wear skirts ruched with rosebuds and the clouds above are "like knots of pink roses"; in *Sorrow in Sunlight* Cuna-Cuna is "full of charming roses," Costa-Rica roses and fresh rosettes—and every evening a rosy dusk glows against the rosy mountains; and in *Cardinal Pirelli* the poetess Diana Beira Baixa clasps "a large bouquet of American Beauty-roses" to her bosom, whilst the Primate himself sighs at the sprawling of Oriental literature and wishes that it would "concentrate its roses."

Some might seize the opportunity for a word-count, remembering his affection for the colour *mauve* and the *henna* rinse so beloved by so many of his characters. Nothing could be more deadly with such a talent. The roses are their own parable. Life is sad, the blooms must fall; Life is cruel, there are thorns.

"CHARTREUSE GREEN—the Charterhouse of Parma—*Voici des jolis de Parme . . .*"

In the winter shrivelling months, crouched over the gas fire, to say these words is to drop the

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LOW TIDE

by Isobel English

sealed cockle shell into a tooth glass, and wait for the flimsy Japanese paper to burst out into the full maturity of stored remembrance; everything tightly compressed, memory dovetailed within memory, worn smooth, now completely painless: the long avenue of limes; the reflection of green light in green water; sitting at a table in the open. This Maytime holiday season there are small

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white almost invisible flowers on the trees that give out an amazing fragrance; and yet it is something connected with the sea's bed that is caught shimmering within the tall glass, it takes me flying over the tops of the battlements (for this city is walled in, locked away from the sea that surrounds its three sides) . . . back to the time when I was 12; the cadence is natural enough in words, colours and textures, the mark of that day I still carry, a small puckering of the skin on the outside of my foot.

* * *

I WAS WALKING BACK over the sands at low-tide with my mother from Lancieux, where we had been to buy crisp pastry boats filled with grapes that floated in a sea of yellow syrup.

I raced ahead over the corrugated stretch, enjoying the ridges that did not crumble under the weight of my instep. I shouted back to my mother: "Do you realise, we're walking on the bottom of the sea? We've no right to be here at all."

Before we reached the Saint Jacut coastline, the waves flattened out as if the sea had no rippling marks to imprint at the land's edge. A layer of mud, creamy and almost entirely free from the grit of powdered shells spread out around us—a transitory state before the beach dried up into the white sugar of an inland cove. Here and there brilliant patches of green sea-grass sprouted like vestigial remains on a great smooth body. I made deliberately for these patches, sinking my feet into the sucking richness, drawing out a grey-booted foot, watching the hard crust form almost immediately it came in contact with the air. My mother picked her way carefully; I noticed that her feet were white as bone, only a few grains of silver and black flecked her rosy ankles flushed to a violent pink, for she had the sensitive skin of a red-head. The word 'Titian' held for me a secret and powerful meaning long before I had ever heard of the painter. It was muttered and incanted like a sorcerer's spell by all the members of my mother's family—it was a family inheritance; one that I did not possess.

The jetty of the *petit port* grew out over the rocks. It was fringed with dark iodine sea-weed. A few fishing boats lay over on their sides like broken limbs waiting for the tide to ease them out of their stiff positions. I walked carefully round the anchor chains, keeping an eye open for broken glass or old tins. The green patches were getting rarer as the crumbly shingle began—a ribbon of no-man's land lying betwen the earth and the sea. Just as I was about to cross over the crisp surface, I noticed a little to the left of me, and set back a few yards from the shingle, a solitary tuft of waving sea-grass—an isolated patch that was hardly a patch at all, but little more than a fringe of green hair that the wind softly lifted now and then. I ran back for a last delicious sensation before walking up on to the dry beach. This time the mud pulled and sucked at my feet with more fervour. I stood for a moment transfixed, a statue riveted to the sea's bed, feeling with pleasure the open panorama—the two fingers of land that were alternatively separated and united by the ebb and flow of the tide; the high ceiling of the sky and the nearness of the hot cliff-side that buzzed with a complicated insect life within its thick gorse and sweet eglantine.

SUDDENLY I FELT a sharp and agonising pain. I must have screamed out; my mother moved silently on the beach were she had been waiting for me, throwing her arms about in a distracted way; I thought that I heard cries of distress, and above them, the idea dropped into my mind even before I had absorbed her fear—"the quicksands." I grew heavier, the mud sucked greedily at my legs, bubbling a little with the effort; already it reached to the middle of my calves.

"Spread yourself out," my mother shouted, "right out like a table-cloth. Try and throw yourself forward!" Her commands were far away, she was in another world, connected only by the weakening wave-lengths of living communication. I was moving fast down into the bowels of the mud. I threw my head backwards in a great effort to see the sky—you simply can't look down at the death that is coming to you. I flung out my arms, and then it was I lost my balance; my head hit the hard moist sand, my back and thighs arched against the resisting land; only my feet and legs bent now with the effort of the backward fall still dabbled in the sticky bottomless hole.

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My mother dragged me up roughly. "You fool, you fool," she cried, the tears of relief and anger flowing over her face. "Now quickly, we must find a rock pool."

I sat on the limpet-crusted rocks dabbling my feet in the warm pool. Plumes of dark mud clouded the water, but within their so soon disintegrating darkness there was a darker and thicker curl that seemed to be coming from the side of my foot. "I think my little toe's off, it must have been one of those razor shells buried in the mud." I lifted my washed foot out of the water and watched the fresh blood drip down my ankle away from the half-severed toe. The sight of this redness awoke in my mother the most violent and primitive feelings; she began to cry and upbraid me and pray to God for direction all in one and the same breath. I realised that I should have to organise my own journey of a mile and a half back to the *pension* where we were staying.

I LOOKED UP THE CLIFF-SIDE and straight into the empty glazed eyes of a villa, the seaside home of two widows of small aristocratic connection. Our relationship with them, although of many years standing, had always been of the most formal kind, and heralded every summer by the presentation of cards on each side before conversation at close range could take place.

In a moment of delirious pain I visualised my mother leaping like a mountain goat up the cliff path, over the moss and carpet of wild thyme, round to the front door of the house, and leaving a card. This side of the house did not look over the sea, but into a narrow lane overshadowed on one side by another high cliff whose worked and long since quarried face had become be..rded with lichen and thick flowering ivy, its blunted edges were black and mysterious, they harboured the softly clinging bat and sharp beaked night-bird that waited for the first shadows to fall.

"You'll have to get me over the rocks to the de Treymes. I couldn't walk through the gorse."

THE TWO SISTERS who must have been at their salon window came out when they saw us struggling up the rocks. They helped me to a wicker chair with a foot-rest, on their closed-in veranda. I understand now why they did not let me into their cool salon. At the time, I looked longingly through the open French windows and yearned to be out of the white inescapable sun. Inside I could see a tall backed chair pulled up to the window where sat their mother. Madame D'Orme, bobbing her head from side to side to see what was going on outside; she was a little shrivelled gooseberry of a woman, who had (so my mother informed me) ennobled herself with the territorial 'de' on the marriage of her elder daughter to the Viscount de Treymes. Needlework lilies sprouted up behind her back, a magnificent sheaf worked by herself when she had been an affianced girl—they were worthy of a bridal bouquet, or a funeral wreath. Now, she was weak in the head, not always able to attract the attention of Marie, the *femme de chambre*, and a foetid staleness hung around that strangely enough seemed to emanate from these lilies.

The remembrance of this unpleasant smell when I had been closeted one day with the old woman, who insisted on offering me sugared almonds out of an empty box, seemed all at once to give an unbearable and sickening quality to the whole scene. My mother, now completely recovered from the shock, chattered and gesticulated in French with the two sisters in their black buttoned dresses. I leaned as politely as I could over the edge of the chair and vomited on to their nice stone veranda. In a second I was attended; undiluted cognac was forced between my lips, and a cloth soaked with *eau de cologne* wiped across my face and hands.

"*Pauvre petit chou*," they cried together, smiling and clapping their hands in mock surprise, tactfully spreading sheets of newspaper over the nasty little mess I had made.

We were offered English tea, which my mother in the circumstances accepted. Our intrusion was suddenly turned into a delightful visit. I thought of the little cakes we had bought at Lancieux; they had disappeared, perhaps she had left them on the beach and, if they were not yet melted by the sun, they would float away—little boats on the incoming tide.

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THE TALK HAD NOW CHANGED from the jerky rhythm of well-mannered inquiry and reply to the more sustained buzz of narrative. With my eyes closed, floating in the shallow world between sleep and consciousness I tried to accustom myself to the agonising pulse that had started to beat in my foot. I heard the well-worn words from one of the sisters that had ceased to have any meaning for her except in the actual feat of spinning them off her tongue like nicely smoothed coins.

"It was most extraordinary," she was saying, "you see we could hear him singing through these open windows—'*aux jardins de mon père les lilas son fleuris*' in his booming, guttural voice, as he came across the sands from the other side." She clapped her hands in time to the sturdy rhythm. "Then, it seemed that his tone became more violent, until it wasn't singing any more but a penetrating cry of '*Au secours.*' We went out on to the veranda but we could see nothing, there was no moon that night, we could only hear the rush of the approaching sea. Back in the *salon* we shut the windows to try and muffle the sound of his cries, but they seemed to come through the cracks and up under the floorboards, all night long, '*au secours*,' '*au secours.*' In the morning, the girl from the village who helps in the kitchen told us that it was the 18 year-old son of the baker who was missing. He had been drinking with some friends at a *tabac* in Ploubalay, and let the time slip by; then, a little tipsy from too much cider, he had decided to take a chance and walk back over the sands, telling his friends that he would avoid the incoming tide by keeping well up the mouth of the estuary. He had forgotten the quicksands that lie just off the land's edge, all around in large and small pockets. They never found his body; nothing except his cloth cap that was washed up a few days later down by the *port*. It was resting on a tuft of green sea-weed that the fishermen strangely enough call 'les cheveux de la mer.' "

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John P. Sisk

WRITERS & SCIENTISTS:

THE TWO CULTURES

"UNTIL RECENTLY," Alfred North Whitehead wrote in 1925, "nearly all writers have been soaked in classical and renaissance literature. For the most part, neither science nor philosophy interested them, and their minds were trained to ignore them." The implication was that the rift between the scientist and the literary intellectual was beginning to close. This is not the impression one gets thirty-five years later from C. P. Snow's little book, *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution.*

Snow's book—originally a series of lectures delivered at Cambridge—made no best-seller list when it appeared in 1960, but it was surely one of the important publishing events of that year. We are indebted to its author not only for the lucidity with which he has called our attention to the rift but for being himself (as was Whitehead before him) a living proof that fruitful communication between the worlds of the scientist and the writer is possible. It can be argued however that its sympathies lie much more with the "optimistic, brash and boastful" scientist than with the "pessimistic," "anti-social" and "politically silly" literary intellectual. I think something more needs to be said for the literary man. At least it might be useful to examine in some detail his suspicion of the scientist.*

FOR ONE THING, the literary man's attitude towards the scientist is likely to be determined not only by classical and Renaissance literature but by the reaction of the romantics to the mechanistic philosophy of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—a reaction that Whitehead himself has presented brilliantly. At the turn of the century Wordsworth wrote:

Sweet is the lore which nature brings;
Our meddling intellect
Misshapes the beauteous forms of things;
—We murder to dissect.

Fifteen years later he was writing to Coleridge out of the same conviction that the philosophy of mechanism "in everything that is most worthy of the human intellect, strikes Death, and cheats itself by mistaking clear images for distinct conceptions." And more than a hundred years later, when D. H. Lawrence wrote in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* that "the devil himself had lent fiend's wits to the technical scientists of industry" the tune had not changed materially. A little later still E. E. Cummings only put it more quotably:

I'd rather learn from one bird how to sing
Than teach ten thousand stars how not to dance.

Between Wordsworth and Cummings the catalogue of literary men who were uneasy, skeptical or pessimistic about science, either for what it ac-

*Since these words were written, F. R. Leavis, distinguished British critic, has come rather sensationally to the defense of the literary man. In a lecture delivered in March 1962 at Cambridge Leavis spoke of C. P. Snow's "Two Cultures" lectures as exhibiting "an utter lack of intellectual distinction" and asserted that as a novelist Snow "doesn't begin to exist." The full text of Leavis' lecture has been printed in *The Spectator*. There is a rather neutral discussion of this controversy by Walter Allen in *The New York Times Book Review* for April 1, 1962, and a decidedly pro-Snow follow-up by Edmund Fuller in the same publication for April 22. *The National Review* for March 27, 1962, enters the lists on Leavis' side. *The National Review* is convinced (as apparently Leavis is also) that the real meaning of Snow's lectures is that scientists should rule the world.

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tually was or for what it aspired to be, is a catalogue of the great names: Keats with his conviction that Newton had taken the poetry out of the rainbow; Tennyson tormented by the stars that blindly ran; Emerson with his "law for thing" running wild and unkinging man; Thoreau with his scorn of the railroad and cable; Morris and the Pre-Raphaelites with their pastoral cult of craft and beauty; Arnold with his nostalgia for the clarity of the Scholar Gypsy; Housman with his weltschmerz of golden lads doomed in a cold, heartless universe; and Henry Adams with his appalling dynamo. Even Whitman, who in "Passage to India" could celebrate the scientific revolution in a way few poets have been able to, had his no less typical moments when, anticipating Cummings, he preferred directly communication with the stars to what the learned astronomer had to say about them.

Writers like Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley and Emerson were able to reject the mechanistic vision of the scientist as inadequate and still avoid the disastrous disjunction of Keats that if science was true poetry was not. Wordsworth and Shelley, Whitehead is able to say, were even closer to the scientific truth of the matter than the mechanistic scientists. But much more often the literary man in the past, as now, was less inclined to question or distinguish when the scientist pronounced as he was to be appalled by the announcement.

At the end of his book *The Universe and Dr. Einstein* Lincoln Barnett makes one of these appalling pronouncements: "And what the scientist and the philosopher call the world of reality—the colorless, soundless, impalpable cosmos which lies like an iceberg beneath the plane of man's perceptions—is a skeleton structure of symbols." If we may take our sanction from the physicist and ignore chronological time, we can find a typical literary man's reaction to this passage in the wonderful and terrible lines from *Moby Dick:*

> "And when we consider that other theory of the natural philosophers, that all other earthly hues—every stately or lovely emblazoning—the sweet tinges of sunset skies and woods; yea, and the gilded velvets of butterflies, and the butterfly cheeks of young girls; all these are but subtle deceits, not actually inherent in substances, but only laid on from without; so that all deified nature absolutely paints like the harlot, whose allurements cover nothing but the charnel house within . . . pondering all this, the palsied universe lies before us a leper . . ."

Still ignoring clock time, one hears echoing behind this Pascal's anguished reaction to Newton: "The eternal silence of these infinite spaces frightens me," or Henry Adams' more subdued anguish when Arthur Balfour announced in 1904 that the human race until that time had lived and died in a world of illusion: "he [Adams] was henceforth to be a conscious ball of vibrating motions traversed in every direction by infinite lines of rotation or vibration, rolling at the feet of the Virgin at Chartres or of M. Poincaré in an attic at Paris, a centre of supersensual chaos."

Adams might prefer his "eighteenth century education when God was a father and nature a mother," but the trouble had started long before that. As Professor Dobzhansky of Columbia puts it: "Copernicus and Galileo so altered man's image of himself that they started the process of his alienation from his world." The result is that, especially in the last one hundred and fifty years, the literary artist has been fighting for his life—or, more specifically, fighting for a view of the universe that would validate his literary vision. In the simplest terms this means fighting for the belief that to say that a rose is crimson is to touch the reality of the rose just as closely as when the physicist defines crimson "in terms of wave length," as Barnett puts it, or "as the value of the energy content of photons."

There was of course the way out of naturalism: the literary man's attempt to get back order and meaning by accepting as ultimate the blind running of the stars. But the literary mind that can sustain itself with creative confidence in the philosophy of naturalism is rare indeed. Perhaps in the strictest sense it is non-existent, for the artist is driven to mythologize, and as soon as he does he leaves naturalism behind him. This is why historical naturalism so often strikes one as romanticism trying to salvage something from its lost faith in the imagination. To the philosophy of naturalism the more understandable literary reaction is in *Dover Beach* or *In Memoriam*—elegiac regret for

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the passing of the good old order—or in *The Shropshire Lad*—elegiac bitterness that the good old order was a lie.

THE BASIC ISSUE with the artist is epistemological. He has a great need to believe in the reality of the sensible universe, however he may believe that universe to be symbolically or mystically involved with a supersensible order of reality. Whatever undermines his confidence in the validity of his senses is a threat to his art. That is why it was said of Descartes that he had cut the throat of poets and why Keats believed that Newton's *Optics* had destroyed the poetry of the rainbow. The paradox is that so many literary artists, with their fondness for transcendental or idealist explanations of reality, have tried, often with considerable success, to be their own Descartes. Just as Poe believed that the most poetic subject is a beautiful dead woman, so there is a kind of writer who seems congenitally disposed to believe that the most poetic of philosophies is one that assumes a universe in which, as Shelley puts it in *The Sensitive Plant*, ". . . nothing is but all things seem,/ And we the shadows of the dream. . . ."

In the optimistic religious or mystic phase of this belief the artist may be sustained by a reality glimpsed behind the illusion, while the illusion itself may be dignified by its symbolic connection with the real. But it is a precarious balance, as one can see in the Platonically infected romantics: at any moment the sensible mirage may dissolve completely and leave the artist in a vacuum, or the noumenal meaning behind the phenomenal veil may cease to make its presence felt. The most fortunate transcendental artists are, I suspect, weak in the affective side of their natures, like Emerson, or blessed with a protective confusion of sex with metaphysics, like Shelley.

The artist, at least as we know him in western civilization, also has a strong need to believe in the worth of the individual, in the importance of his purely private experience in the universe and in the validity of his conviction that he can be a maker of history and is not simply its product. This makes up something like an artist's creed (it is also the creed of common experience). Obviously all sorts of artists, especially since the eighteenth century, have been skeptics, agnostics or downright atheists with regard to this creed, and some of them have made great art out of their uncertainties, their gropings and their existential agonies.

But there appears to be a point beyond which loss of faith cannot be separated from technical deterioration. Yvor Winters offers this explanation for what he considers the deterioration of the poetry of Wallace Stevens. Stevens' universe, Winters says, "is impersonal and devoid of any comfort except that which one may derive from the contemplation of the mute bare splendors." In *Moby Dick* Melville could contemplate the possibility of a universe of mute bare splendors and produce an exuberant and passionate novel, but he had other possibilities to contemplate as well, and besides, he had young nerves.

FROM LUCRETIUS TO ROBINSON JEFFERS no artist of any consequence has been able to accept as a fact and contemplate with equanimity a mute bare universe in which the individual has no meaning beyond that of a blindly driven particle. Either he has mythologized the blindly driving force (which is a kind of religious identification); or he has reacted to it with anger, pity or elegiac regret; or by the very act of making art out of what seems to him to be a chaotic, determinist or malign universe he has demonstrated the possibility of a very real kind of control and so has dignified the individual as controller. This is the irony that undercuts all relativist, materialist, determinist and positivist positions. Purely considered, they are humanly unacceptable and assume a universe radically out of rapport with man's capacity to apprehend it. The artistic act itself, then, implies a philosophic judgment that often denies the explicit statement in the thing made.

Even the scientist needs a heroic kind of self abstraction to stand on these positions—or something like Coleridge's temporary suspension of disbelief. What supports him in the attempt is no doubt what Snow calls the "moral component right in the grain of science itself," and the quasi-religious nature of his commitment to what he considers to be the truth. When Laplace told Na-

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poleon that in his studies of celestial mechanics he had found God an unnecessary hypothesis he was talking not so much about his atheism as his conversion to a new religion. Einstein was more explicit about it when he said that "the cosmic religious experience is the strongest and noblest mainspring of scientific research."

Now science at its best or rightly understood may not represent any threat to the artist's need to believe in the validity of the sensible universe and in the worth and importance of the individual's history in it. But historically science has often presented such a threat and has thus understandably gotten a reputation among artists generally, and certainly among writers, as being the enemy. The stature of science in the post-Renaissance world has been such that one is always tempted to accept as the truth of the matter what is true in the scientist's frame of reference. One measure of the success of science is the extent to which it has forced the disjunction, either science or poetry, on the world and then compelled a choice for itself.

Thus to get to reality one leaves the illusory world of the senses and descends through the microscope or ascends through the telescope, taking quantum theory or relativity theory like alternate trains to the same destination. A book like Barnett's, which is exactly the sort of account a literary man might turn to in order to find out what is happening in the enemy's camp, is full of this platonic bias: "It is as though the true objective world lies forever half concealed beneath a translucent, plastic dome . . ." and "in place of the deceitful and chaotic representations of the senses since has substituted varying systems of symbolic representation." Inevitably, the references to Plato in the last and summarizing chapter are numerous—for man, as Plato said, "will not rest at those multitudinous phenomena whose existence is appearance only." Ironically, western literature's long love affair with Plato has left it particularly vulnerable to this use of its idol.

A DEVALUATION OF THE REALITY of the sensible universe inevitably devalues man, the sensible poetic observer. Again, I am not concerned with whether science as such concedes validity to the writer's frame of reference but with the historical effect of science on man's understanding of himself and his place in the universe. As interpreted by men like Whitehead, Noüy or Teilhard, the genuine advances of science, however momentarily upsetting, are humanly enriching and end in, or ought to end in, an enrichment of the writer's vision. Nevertheless, in its total effect on countless laymen, writers and readers alike, science has had a belittling effect on the purely personal experience of life similar to that of the first book of *Gulliver's Travels*.

That there is some hope for free will in the indeterminism of quantum physics is cold comfort to the literary man. His belief in the importance of the purely personal life with its joys, agonies, tragedies, absurdities and dilemmas is, as we can see in modern literature, easily unnerved. It is of course partly his own fault, not only for failing to understand science but for having lost faith in his ability to understand himself. "Is not the conveying of the quality or value of an experience, therefore, a contribution to knowledge no less useful than the analysis of that experience in terms of physical fact and natural law?" asks C. Day Lewis in *The Poet's Way of Knowledge*. The writer knows that unless he can say yes to this with all his heart he is nothing, but too often he can only half believe it.

Snow depicts the scientist as accusing the literary intellectual of pessimism and the literary intellectual as accusing the scientist of optimism. The pessimism of the one is of course relative to the optimism of the other, but there is a great deal of pessimism built into the writer's purely human frame of reference. It is partly a matter of time, which the writer must come to terms with in quite a different way than the scientist as scientist does. The space-time of the processes of the universe is not the existential time of the human microcosm, in which a complexity of issues must be faced in a degree of isolation and with a deadline that would make science impossible.

Indeed, what feeds the scientist's optimism—the apparent convergence of all lines of scientific effort on a grand unified field theory—may only increase the writer's pessimism. For as the lines of science converge the media of communication

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multiply and accelerate, and the individual is confronted with the need to organize an ever increasing flood of information in an effort to arrive at something like a unified field theory of his own.

The writer, in fact, is inclined to suspect that the scientist can be optimistic largely because he has abstracted himself out of his human condition, and this often strikes the literary man as a kind of betrayal. Snow believes that most scientists are aware that "the individual condition of each of us is tragic. . . . But nearly all of them—and this is where the colour of hope genuinely comes in—would see no reason why, just because the individual condition is tragic, so must the social condition be." What the scientist is interested in, Snow continues, is the human condition: men, for instance, are underfed and die before their time, and the scientist is optimistic about his ability to do something about it. The literary man may applaud this ambition and be grateful that there are men to act on it. But at the same time it may seem to him equivalent to saying that while the private tragedy of the individual may be a fact it is not really a very important one when put in the scale with more cosmic issues. The writer in our time has good reason to be suspicious of those who ask him to weigh himself in the scale with cosmic issues. He knows, if only obscurely, that there is a kind of selflessness the opposite of which is not selfishness but ignorance, fear or hatred of the self.

ABOUT THE SAME TIME that a handful of Americans were being introduced to C. P. Snow's book, *This Week* magazine was serializing a popular example of scientific optimism and selflessness in the form of Werner von Braun's "novel," *Life on Mars*. In this story a group of dedicated American scientists arrive on Mars and find there an unbelievably advanced civilization. The Martians, however, have been enervated by ignoble ease. They are not corrupt (genuine corruption or evil is inconceivable in terms of this story); there is, in fact, a kind of Adamic innocence about these Martians. They have ceased to struggle, to explore, to push courageously into the unknown, one of their elders explains, and he warns the earthmen that a similar fate may await them. At the end, however, it is clear that the courageous example of the earthmen has had a rejuvenating effect upon the Martians, who, as the earthmen depart, are launching their first artificial satellite.

Now it may not be fair to judge Dr. von Braun's naïve bedtime story as fiction. He claims only to be relaxing from the rigors of rocket making with a moral allegory, the import of which is that we need to "keep our minds open to new worlds and new wonders in the expanding conquest of our universe." But the significant thing here is the quality of innocence and optimism in this pseudo novel. It belongs with the world of Tom Swift, Buck Rogers and Space Cadets, except that these equally selfless heroes have the advantage of conventional tension-creating plots. There is in it absolutely no sense of the human person; the characters are hardly even conventional types.*

This is of course part of the secret of its optimism. One can be optimistic about doing something with men en masse or about the application of atomic energy to industry or about lighting up the remote dark corners of the universe, and it is doubtless a good thing one can. But it is best first to take a stand somewhere outside the world of the lonely, confused, tragic individual. When Aldous Huxley wrote *Brave New World*, a novel that superficially has a good deal in common with *Life on Mars*, he was writing a novel of ideas that nevertheless was oriented to the human person, and so the result was what the scientist might call a typically pessimistic literary performance.

Indeed, the comparison of Huxley and von Braun only emphasizes what some writers suspect about scientists: that their optimism is in direct relation to the abstraction of their world—a world

*Von Braun's failure as a fiction writer cannot of course be separated from his lack of familiarity with the necessary technique. A similar case can be urged against C. P. Snow: that having as a novelist cut himself off from the mainstream of twentieth century fiction he lacks the technical equipment necessary to do justice to his material. In this connection I find significant a remark made by Robert Gorham Davis in an otherwise favorable review of Snow's novel *The Affair* (*The New York Times Book Review*, May 8, 1960). After speaking of Snow's rejection of prevailing literary modes because they "went hand in hand with social attitudes either wicked, or absurd, or both," Professor Davis goes on to say: "Though [Snow] fully acknowledges the dark areas of the individual psyche and the more nightmarish aspects of history in our time, he has not found ways of dealing with them, from his own perspective, that represent an imaginative advance beyond the work of those writers he condemns."

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that however sophisticated and complex it may be is still less agonizingly complicated than that in which the flesh-and-spirit individual must find his way to some meaning. The scientist, like that other congenital optimist, the business man, is able to escape from the uncleared jungle of his own personality into a universe of relatively clear-cut "larger" and non-human issues. Thus in his more pessimistic and rancorous moments the literary man writes scientist and business man into versions of the Faust story, in which, as over-reachers who have aspired above common humanity, they are made to suffer the pratfalls that afford the literary man both comfort and revenge.

SCIENTIFIC STYLE is itself a technique designed to cut the complicated and unique person out of the picture, so far as that is possible. V. S. Prichett, commenting on scientific prose, once wrote that its preferences for passive constructions was intended to create the "bureaucratic impression that things 'were done' and that nobody 'did' them." Such a style, he added, aimed at keeping out the "frivolous and unstable ego." But such a style, even if assumed consciously and temporarily, has a tendency to act back against the user and to confirm in him the world-view it implies: the letter giveth life.

What the literary man objects to is the impression many scientists give of having found the only precise way to use language, when at best they have only found the most precise way to use it in their own frame of reference. In the world of the "frivolous" and "unstable" ego, where the most precise kind of communication is poetic, the scientist's kind of precision may miss the meaning entirely. So the rift between Snow's two cultures, then, might be described as a difference of styles, but few differences can be more divisive.

Nevertheless, Snow is certainly right in deploring the rift and in seeing in it the direst consequences for our culture. It is bad for the scientist, for if science is not for persons for whom is it? Science cut off from a sense of and a regard for the unique human person becomes a form of hubris, a Faustian rage for order, dominated, like Fascism or Communism, by a monstrous esthetic of its own.

And the rift is bad for the literary man, for it can only increase his sense of being cut off from reality, his sense of incipient chaos, thus driving him into patterns of stoicism, cynicism or irrationalism that are always available in our culture. He needs to know more about science, not only to defend himself against its false claims but to enrich his conception of reality. "The living world," writes Teilhard de Chardin, "can be summarized as the elaboration of ever more perfect eyes within a cosmos in which there is always something more to be seen." For the literary man and the scientist it is finally a question not only of time and style but of vision.

JOHN P. SISK, *a Professor of English at Gonzaga University (Seattle), has published articles in* Commonweal, America, Critique, Thought, *and* Prairie Schooner. *He won the 1961 Carl Foreman Award for the best short novel in a contest sponsored by Harcourt, Brace, & World, Inc.*

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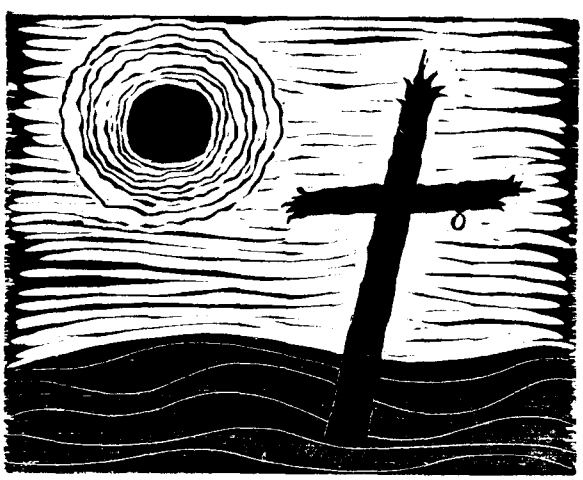
The Ballad of Sir Patrick Spens



Illustrated by Ronald Hughes

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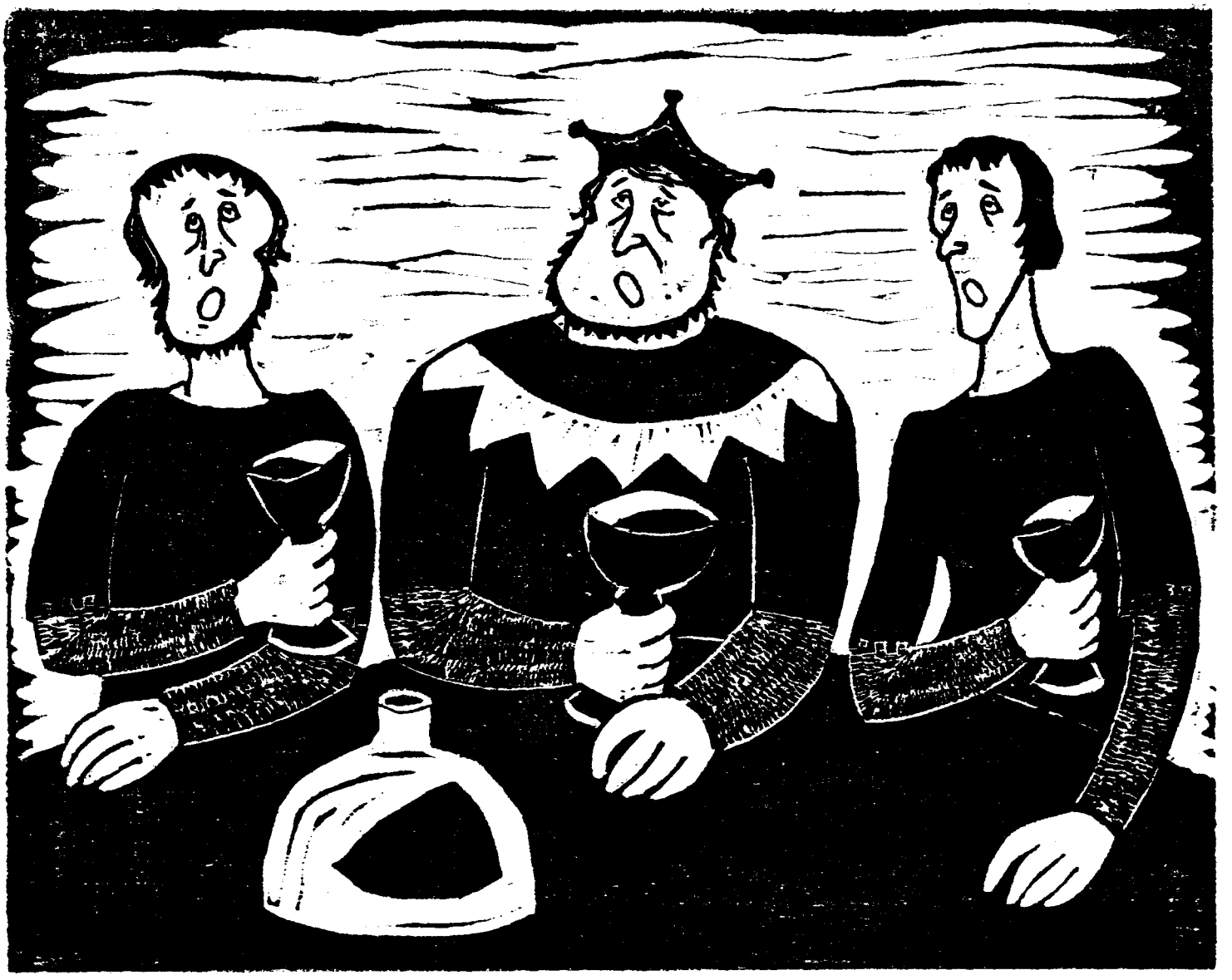

The king sits in Dumferling toune,
Drinking the blude-reid wine:

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"O whar will I get guid sailor,
To sail this schip of mine?"

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Up and spak an eldern knicht,
Sat at the king's richt kne:
"Sir Patrick Spens is the best sailor
That sails upon the se."

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The king has written a braid letter,
And signd it wi his hand,
And sent it to Sir Patrick Spens,
Was walking on the sand.

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The first line that Sir Patrick red,
A loud lauch lauched he;

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The next line that Sir Patrick red,
The teir blinded his ee.

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"O wha is this has don this deid,
This ill deid don to me,
To send me out this time o' the yeir,
To sail upon the se!

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"Mak hast, mak haste, my mirry men all,
Our guid schip sails the morne:"

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"O say na sae, my master deir,
For I feir a deadlie storme.

"Late late yestreen I saw the new moone,
Wi the auld moone in hir arme,
And I feir, I feir, my deir master
That we will cum to harme."

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O our Scots nobles wer richt laith
To weet their cork-heild schoone;
Bot lang owre a' the play wer playd,
Their hats they swam aboone.

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O lang, lang may their ladies sit,
Wi thair fans into their hand,
Or eir they se Sir Patrick Spens
Cum sailing to the land.

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O lang, lang may the ladies stand,
Wi thair gold kems in their hair,
Waiting for thair ain deir lords,
For they'll se thame na mair.

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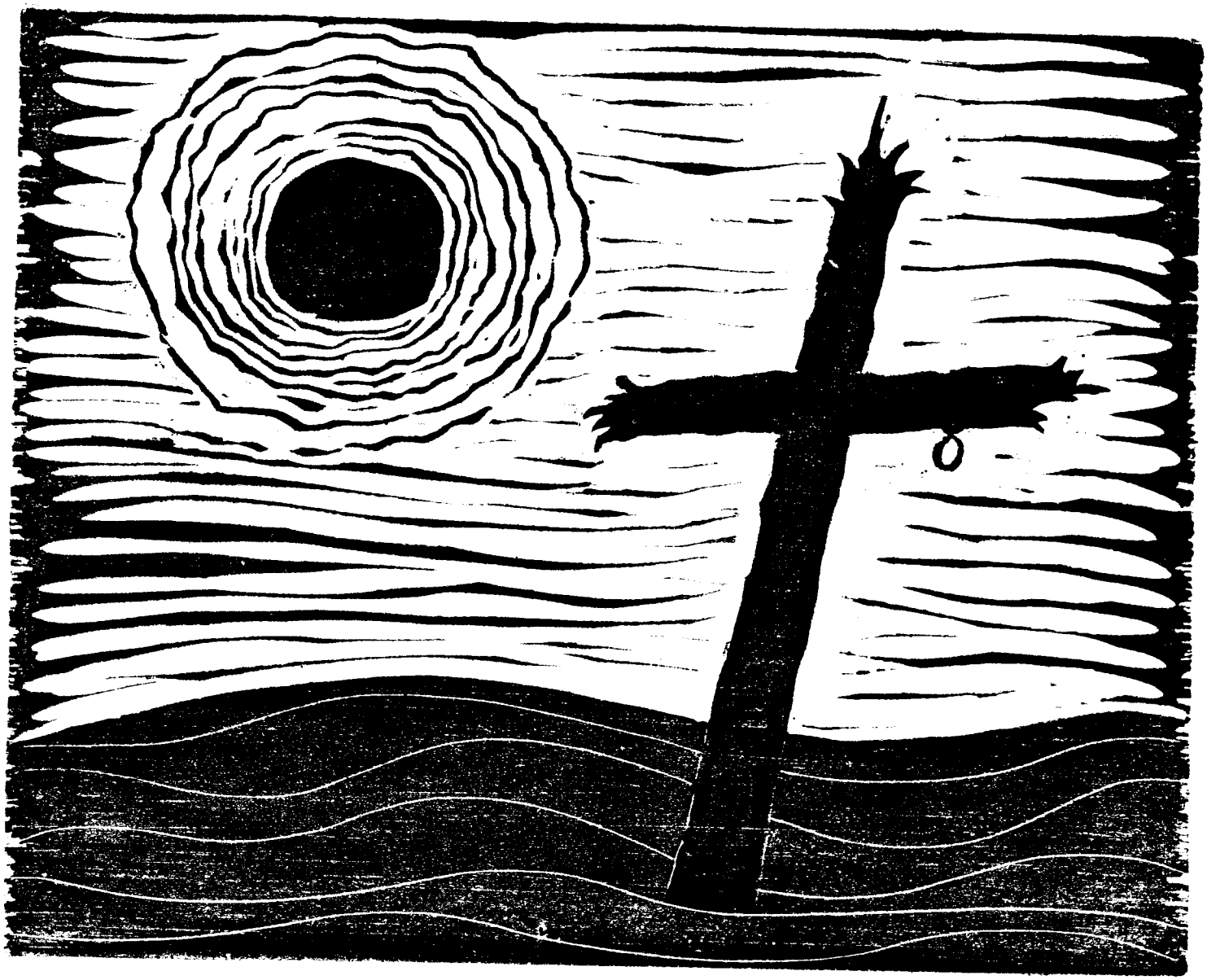

Haf owre, haf owre to Aberdour,
It's fiftie fadom deip,
And thair lies guid Sir Patrick Spens,
Wi the Scots lords at his feit.

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Das Deutsche Theater Menu
Katze auf einem heissen Blechdach
die Glas Tierschau
der Tod der Rosa Sonn
der Tod eines Handlungsreisenden
wir sind noch einmal davongekommen
das Tagebuch der Anne Frank
der Prozess Adolf Eichmann
Furcht und Elend des Dritten Reiches
Leben des Galilei
Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder
der gutbehütete Aufstieg des Arturo Ui

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THE GERMAN THEATRE MENU

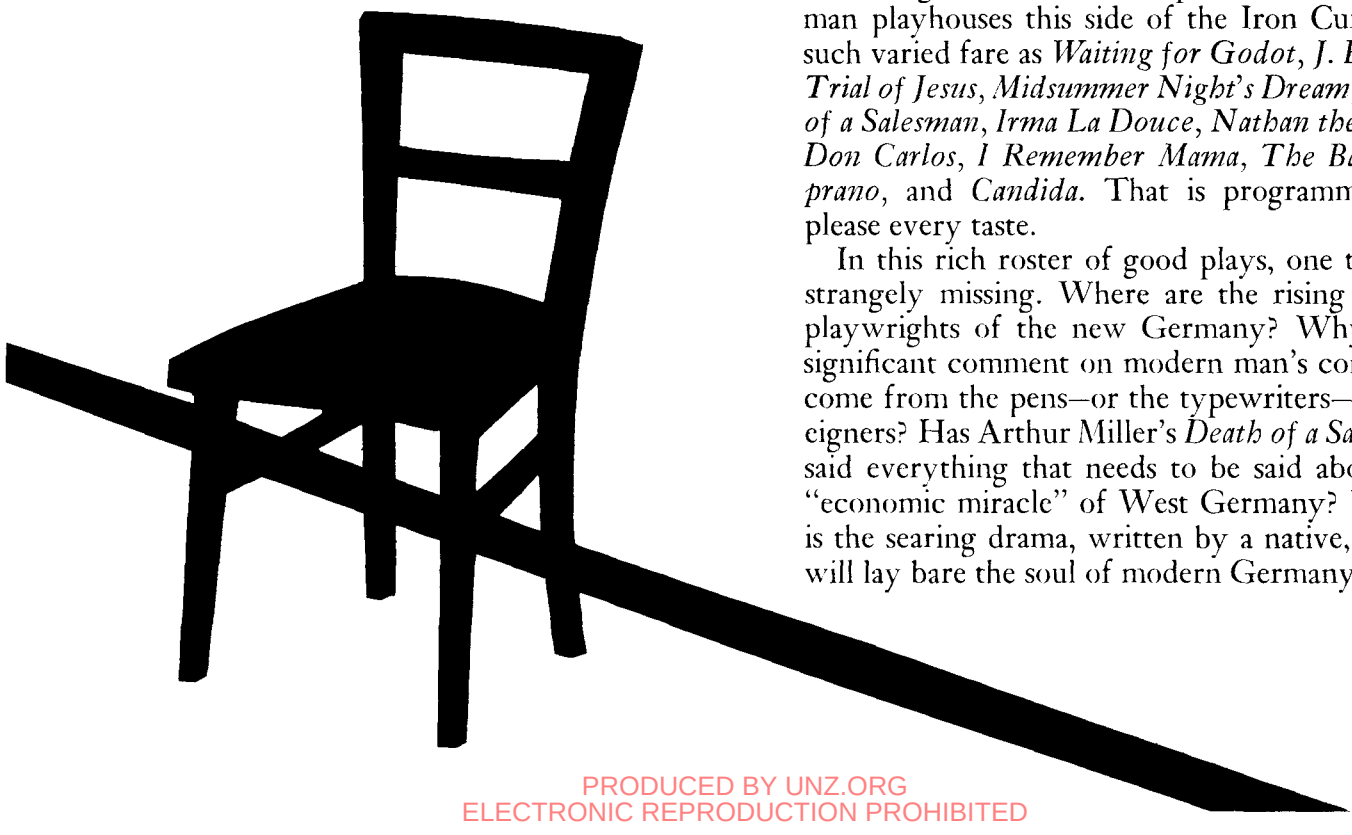
by Glenn M. Loney

IF IT IS TRUE THAT THE THEATRE of any era reflects the society it serves, then the West German theatre certainly provides a curious puzzle today. The mirror that this theatre holds up to life has been violently shattered by a disastrous war and pieced together again with the fragments—some clouded with age. A glittering collection of minute reflections and distortions has been the result.

That is not to say that a season's repertoire in Frankfurt, Hamburg, or Stuttgart will not be as much or more varied and stimulating than a comparable Broadway season. Actually, the number of brilliant stagings of dramatic classics probably outweighs that of any other nation, if for no other reason than the great number of municipal or state-supported theatres. Important modern plays are not neglected either. The latest London, Paris, and New York successes are rapidly brought to the stage. On at least one occasion, an American play—Edward Albee's *The Death of Bessie Smith*—was premiered in Germany.

Among this season's new productions in German playhouses this side of the Iron Curtain is such varied fare as *Waiting for Godot*, *J. B.*, *The Trial of Jesus*, *Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Death of a Salesman*, *Irma La Douce*, *Nathan the Wise*, *Don Carlos*, *I Remember Mama*, *The Bald Soprano*, and *Candida*. That is programming to please every taste.

In this rich roster of good plays, one thing is strangely missing. Where are the rising young playwrights of the new Germany? Why must significant comment on modern man's condition come from the pens—or the typewriters—of foreigners? Has Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* said everything that needs to be said about the "economic miracle" of West Germany? Where is the searing drama, written by a native, which will lay bare the soul of modern Germany?



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After the war, many people expected that the writers who had fled Nazi persecution would return and revitalize the theatre. Such men as Erich Kästner and Carl Zuckmayer, it was said, would certainly have something to say about German national character and the evils of the Hitler period after their long exile. Kästner's return prompted some sharp cabaret satires and an increased interest in *Emil and the Detectives*, but no startling drama of insights. Zuckmayer's *The Devil's General* studied the disintegration of an officer under the Nazi system, but the public clearly favored his *Schinderhannes* and earlier works.

Perhaps the only pre-war talent to give something new and important was Bertolt Brecht. He had made better use of his American exile than Zuchmayer, and the time was right for a play like *Mother Courage*, especially since audiences frequently saw a message of man's survival in the struggles and agonies of the central character, rather than the bitter indictment of war and human greed Brecht had designed.

Brecht's "Epic" style is sufficiently uncomplicated that his ideas can project themselves directly to the audience without much distortion. When projected "sub-titles" and narrators interrupt the drama to stress the meaning of what is being seen, it is not easy to ignore the dramatist's intent. The novelty of some German productions, however, has been such that the visual aspects have served to divert some attention away from the content. Generally, though, theatres have not been afraid to present Brecht's stronger plays, for the basic themes are universal enough. Even Catholic Munich was stimulated by *Galileo*, which reflects no credit upon the Church—and very little credit upon its hero, who is exposed as a compromiser. Brecht's desire to castigate the Nazis in such plays as *The Private Life of the Master Race* and *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* has been indulged far more in East Berlin, where the Communist regime gave him his own theatre, than in Augsburg, where he was born.

In any case, vital new theatre movements more often come from relatively young writers, rebelling against stale formulas and outmoded ideas of the established dramatists or the gods of the past. From the fragmentary results, though, it would seem that audiences don't want a new, unbroken mirror held up to reflect their lives.

Nearly five years ago, in Wiesbaden, this attitude was clearly revealed at the premiere of *Triumph in a Thousand Years*," a penetrating drama by Peter Hirche, winner of the Gerhardt Hauptmann Prize for Playwriting. Though the play had structural weaknesses, these were not the principal cause of anguish among the citizenry whose taxes support the theatre. Even before the opening, war veterans and mothers who had lost sons in the West and the East were voicing angry resentment: "Is our sacrifice to be made to seem cheap and worthless?" The play was withdrawn not long after.

There have been other attempts, of course. Karl Wittlinger's *Do You Know the Milky Way?*, which recently had a *very* short run on Broadway, has had a healthy Germany career, especially in productions by studio-theatre groups. The play, dealing with a returned German soldier's therapy in a mental institution, tries to answer, not so much the Wiesbadener's question as the more general questions of identity and guilt and innocence. Complex and analytical as it is, it is no wonder Broadway audiences didn't respond as enthusiastically as they did to *How To Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*.

Other young—or younger—dramatists, such as Leopold Ahlsen, Herbert Asmodi, Richard Hey, Tankred Dorst—who was a P. O. W. in the United States, and Heinar Kipphardt, are also writing, though some of their work shows a tendency to amuse the audience rather than to make it think. There have been one or two serious pieces and some sharp satire from these men, but nothing resembling a movement or a theatre renaissance has yet appeared.

Plays about the excesses of the Hitler period have been produced, somewhat gingerly, but they have been mainly written by outsiders. Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett's dramatization of *The Diary of a Young Girl* has had an immense success. There is scarcely an important city or state theatre which has not had an effec-

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tive, moving production of Anne's Frank's tragic story. When it first appeared, audiences sat in stunned, occasionally tearful silence after the curtain fell. A recent production of Millard Lampell's *The Wall*, adapted from John Hersey's account of the last days of the Warsaw Ghetto was similarly received in Munich. *The Diary of Anne Frank* has been widely produced in Austria and Switzerland, but the enthusiastic audience response surely has different roots than those of the German audience.

Jean Paul Sartre's *The Prisoner of Altona* has had some celebrity the past few seasons, dealing as it does with a Nazi officer, hidden in the attic by his influential shipbuilding family. The supposed analogy with the Krupps has caused some discomfort among the critics. Sartre, however, is also non-German.

The Trial of Jesus, by Diego Fabbri, caused a sensation in Munich in 1959. Variously praised and denounced by the clergy of the major faiths, the devout fairly rushed to the theatre to discover for themselves whether the Romans were actually responsible for Jesus' Crucifixion. The "trial" referred to in the title is a theatrical improvisation of a travelling Jewish theatre troupe, in which members of the audience—played by actors—get involved. Also done off-Broadway at the York Theatre, the play symbolically examines the bases of anti-Semitism, of social responsibility and guilt. One of the actors suffers from the knowledge that he allowed the Nazis to seize his brother without trying to save him—because he was more anxious to save himself.

The problem of responsibility, always a difficult one for a defeated nation, seems to be a subject theatre audiences wish to avoid. German executives like to relax at the theatre as much as their New York counterparts. Despite this, Saul Leavitt's *The Andersonville Trial* has been given several successful productions. Since the infamous Captain Wirz was one of the first modern "war criminals," who pleaded he was "only following orders," the interest the play generates is understandable, especially when the scene is America, not Nuremberg.

AMERICANS WHO ARE NOT FAMILIAR with Germany or who have cause to dislike Teutonic ways find German reaction—or lack of it—to the period 1933-45, both baffling and unsatisfactory. It is not easy for the conqueror to see things through the eyes of the defeated. Some will argue that it is not even necessary, but this view precludes an awareness of attitudes which should not be ignored. Though no loud pronouncements have been issued in Western Germany, there is an undercurrent of feeling that Germany was not necessarily wrong, just because she had the misfortune to lose the war. This sentiment is not the exclusive property of the ex-Nazis either. Even some of those who had no cause to love the Nazis or who regarded Hitler as a lunatic still feel that Germany and Germans are somehow superior to neighboring lands and peoples. The increasing dominance of German industrialism and finance in Western Europe is privately seen by some responsible Germans as a vindication of Germany's destiny to lead. The presence of Russia, crouching on the borders of free Europe and the consequent Allied rebuilding of the German military machine is a bitter justification, to some, of the campaign against Russia. It is not uncommon today to hear a German laugh sardonically about American troops in Germany training for the possible and feared Russian invasion. Often, he will denounce war, having no desire to see Munich or Frankfurt again destroyed by bombs, but he cannot resist noting that, had the Allies joined the Germans in 1945, they could together have defeated the Russians. The rejoinder that we do not, customarily, stab our allies in the back is occasionally met with withering scorn: "Politically, you Americans are children."

IN ADDITION to these ambivalent feelings about the rightness or wrongness of World War II, are the confused feelings about guilt for the Nazi persecutions. Obviously, those who were clearly involved or who supported the infamies find it wise not to advertise their roles and possibly they may find it easier to live with themselves by simply "forgetting." Many conscientious people, though, their hours full of business and family concerns, feel deeply responsible for the past,

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even though they had no hand in the horrors of the Hitler regime. They know now what a citizen's responsibility is, even though they did not act then. It has been a bitter lesson, and, for many, the mass terror of saturation bombing was a punishment heaped on innocent and guilty alike which they feel partly expiated the crimes. That is, of course, their personal view, and might find little validity in the eyes of someone who survived Belsen. Last summer, one writer asked me, "How long are we supposed to make a public demonstration of these painful guilt feelings for the benefit of tourists?" That is a question only Germans can answer.

These complex attitudes, some of them defiant, some apologetic, are not easy to understand, though they may be condemned by an outsider. They have, however, bearing on what German theatre audiences enjoy and dislike and, consequently, on what is produced.

In general, there seems to be a strong desire to ignore the short life-span of the "Thousand Year Reich," especially in the theatre. This is often disappointing for foreigners. After the war, some of the Allied occupation staff hoped the theatre might be a vehicle for democratic re-education. Certainly Broadway has no such purpose, so this may have been an unreasonable demand to make of German theatre.

GERMAN AUDIENCES, like their American counterparts, like to be entertained when they see a play. Works that are awkwardly propagandistic or which constantly and vividly recall unpleasant memories can scarcely command wide popularity. On the other hand, German theatregoers are amused and entertained by great classics which Broadway would surely find "too philosophical" or "too dated."

Essentially, theatre offerings reflect what the public will tolerate. With the exception of a few small commercial theatres in large cities such as Berlin and Munich, all theatres are supported by taxes. The Intendant, or theatre director, programs dramas which he hopes will raise the level of popular taste and possibly make the audience think a bit, too, but he does not go out of his way to achieve those worthy goals. If an experimental play is too obtuse or too painful, it will be withdrawn, but not before those who care have seen it. Audiences are primarily subscription ticket-holders, so foregoing a play which promises to be unpalatable means a loss of money. Thus, the Intendant has to make sure that his subscribers are kept happy.

A number of Intendants are men who learned their lessons in the pre-war theatre. From time to time, some unpleasant political reminiscences may involve a prominent theatre personality, but the convenient fiction that artists are innocents in public affairs can be invoked. Possibly to avoid any controversy, these men usually stage "safe" plays. Whatever the reason, it is not uncommon to find the staging more experimental than the content. Gustaf Gründgens' much discussed *Faust*, which was seen in New York at the City Center last season, is a case in point. Settings and interpretations can be daring, even cause for furious debate, but the script remains a sedate, respected cultural antique.

ANOTHER FACTOR is difficult to calculate. Are writers afraid to say what they think? Supposedly, if a man believes something, and if he has talent to express that belief, he will eventually do so. Kästner, who had the novel experience of seeing his own books burnt by the Nazis, did not remain silent. One of recent history's most vivid lessons, however, is that this year's courageous novel or brilliant play may be, ten years from now, a one-way ticket to the gallows. As a result, some talented young writers who even now repeat the magic phrase, "Better Red Than Dead," let themselves write profitable stories for ladies' magazines. When one thinks like a rabbit, it is not easy to speak like a lion.

A newly successful young dramatist, Johannes Mario Simmel, has recently turned to magazine fiction, but there are signs it is not a permanent dedication. His play, *The School Friend*, was widely produced several seasons ago and was admired by audiences and critics. It has something to say about the Nazi period, but it says it obliquely. The "school friend" refers to Hermann Goerring, who had his old school chum declared insane to protect him from punishment

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for having sheltered a fugitive Jew. The friend, now old, destitute, and officially insane, has to commit a petty crime to prove he knows the difference between right and wrong—and is therefore really sane. Sanity officially restored, his civil rights are also returned. The play is a documentary rather than dramatic poetry, but it has poignant moments.

EVEN BRECHT'S *Private Life of the Master Race* is a bit dated, but it will always be a good thesis play for those who want to keep the memory of Nazi evil alive as a warning. For the Germans, who usually want to forget the times when they suffered or were the cause of others' suffering, the play is a knife probing an almost healed wound. Two summers ago in Munich, the Kammerspiele was showing a fine production of this work. It was, for an outsider, almost as interesting to watch the audience as the play. Applause was genuine, but restrained. During the scenes, however, sharp gasps, nervous laughter, and sudden whispers bore witness to the effect the play was having. Such episodes as the Jewish Wife, the Sermon on the Mount, and the Informer obviously elicited the shock of recognition. The latter, dealing with a teacher-father's fear of his cryptically innocent Hitler-youth son, is daily being re-played in East Germany, where youths are given athletic equipment in return for betraying would-be escapees from the "Paradise on Earth."

Brecht's curious blindness to the iniquities of the East German regime, which has been systematically copying much of the Nazi system, has long been a source of irritation to West German directors. When the "Wall" went up, a number of Intendants seized the opportunity to announce an unofficial boycott of Brechtiana. Whether this was motivated from the avaricious desire to prevent any royalties from going behind the Iron Curtain or merely because the dramatic content of his plays is offensive has not been made quite clear. A few thoughtful critics have pointed out that a Brecht ban would be little more than a return to the Nazi book burnings. Accordingly, Brecht is still on view. Wuppertal is doing *Three-Penny Opera;* Bielefeld, *The Good Woman of Setzuan;* and Rendsburg, *Mother Courage.*

AN INTERESTING SIDELIGHT on German theatre, which usually has seasonal programs reading like an outline of theatre history, is the great number of American plays presented. The appeal of Thornton Wilder is understandable, and not just because he is an occasional visitor and lecturer in Germany. *Our Town* has undeniably universal appeal. *The Skin of Our Teeth,* known in Germany as *Wir Sind Noch Einmal Davongekommen*—or *We Got Out of It Again*—has had an immediate appeal to a nation once shattered and defeated. Despite the agonies of cruelly waged war, the play offers hope that man will survive, and Wilder's affirmation was very much needed in Germany just after the war. *The Matchmaker* is based on an old German farce, so it is no wonder some theatre lovers look on Wilder as nearly a German playwright, though not quite with the same reverence they reserve for Shakespeare, who, one is occasionally told, was "certainly German in thought and spirit."

Eugene O'Neill has little in common with Wilder, but his popularity is even greater. *Moon for the Misbegotten, Touch of the Poet,* and *A Long Day's Journey into Night* have all enjoyed large audiences and lengthy repertory runs in recent seasons. O'Neill gives the German bravura actor a better chance to show off his vocal talents and flamboyant style than do anti-poetic writers of modern realism.

Like the film, *Gone With the Wind,* Arthur Miller's *Der Tod Eines Handlungsreisenden* seems to be on display somewhere every season. A spiteful university student once told me that Germans enjoy *Death of a Salesman* because it shows that the American way of life isn't the perfect solution to existence either. Whatever the reason, this play has the status of a classic now. The other Miller plays have their brief season and depart.

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS has created as much of a stir in Germany as at home. *The Glass Menagerie* remains a favorite after *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* has been shelved. When it was announced that one Williams play would not be produced in Vienna last season, a critic remarked: "God be thanked that this sweet bird of youth has

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flown by." Austrian theatre is not so very different from German, so these words may indicate a shift of taste.

Three years ago, when I met a former teacher, Henry Schnitzler, son of Arthur, the famed playwright, I asked him how he liked directing in Vienna at the Josefstadt Theatre after some eighteen years in the United States. He was pleased, he commented, with the audience's lively response, and touched by the compliments of tradesmen and laborers who appreciated his work. He contrasted that to the lethargy he had found in university audiences in Berkeley and Los Angeles, where he had taught. Viennese audiences, he also noted, were becoming bored with American plays about small American families with small neurotic problems. For people who have been defeated in two epic wars and who are threatened with worse in the future, such playwriting is ephemeral and uninteresting.

These sentiments were reflected frequently when I talked with theatre people or playgoers in Germany. Reviewing last summer some of the comments I have made in this article, I was stopped short by a German critic: "You praise our classical repertoire, but damn us for avoiding modern problems. Your theatre hardly ever does the classics, whether Greek or Norwegian. Last season, your best plays, or shall we say your biggest successes, were imported from London or Paris." I was going to defend some of our scripts about contemporary problems, but I was interrupted with: "How can you talk about original playwriting when all your dramatists think about is expanding a successful TV play or adapting a novel? And how can you be interested in petty little plays about petty little people?"

MY ANSWER CAN BE WILDER AND MILLER AND WILLIAMS. Willy Loman, in one sense, is certainly petty. Amanda Wingfield is pathetic. The people of *Our Town* are simple and uncomplicated. But the plays are not petty; they add dignity and dimension to the human condition. And Germans are interested in them.

With so much that is fine, the German theatre has yet to produce the new works which make a universal commentary on man's life and illuminate the German enigma. Somewhere in that country, bursting with business and new-found wealth, is a voice waiting to be heard.

GLENN M. LONEY *has directed productions of classic drama in Athens and modern drama in Munich; he spends part of each year in Europe. His dramatic criticism has appeared in* Commonweal, Theatre Arts, Modern Drama, *and* Education Theatre Journal.

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Poetry and Prose by

Brother Antoninus

+ The Hazards of Holiness

+ Pages from an unpublished autobiography

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A Californian *of Norwegian descent, Brother Antoninus was born William Oliver Emerson in Sacramento in 1912. Except for reading tours in the East and South, he has passed his entire life on the West Coast. He resides as a lay brother at the Dominican House of Studies in Oakland, works as a master printer on the Albertus Magnus Press, and writes in leisure hours the devotional poems collected in* The Crooked Lines of God *and the forthcoming volume,* The Hazards of Holiness.

As a young man, a farmer-writer in the San Joaquin Valley, he was a disciple of Lawrence and Jeffers and the exponent of a kind of pastoral pantheism. His almost mystical view of the integrity of unspoliated Nature he was to see, in the retrospect of the war years, as an essentially religious view. But during World War Two, when he stood forth courageously as a conscientious objector, he did not adhere to any specifically formulated religion: his was the nondoctrinal devotion of a basically religious temperament as responsive to Berdyaev or Kierkegaard as to St. Thomas Aquinas. His conversion (described in certain moving pages of his Autobiography) occurred during the Christmas Season of 1948. Following a short period with a Catholic Worker group, he entered the Dominican Order in 1951, assuming the name Brother Antoninus.

A selection of his pre-Catholic poems was published by New Directions in 1948 as The Residual Years. *The "fashionable quarterly" reviewers neglected its contents and concentrated instead on the combative dust-jacket (written by Kenneth Rexroth) which lashed out at "academic circles where an emasculated and hallucinated imitation of John Donne is still considered chic." Yet, even in* The Residual Years, *his most Lawrencian work, he did not have the resemblance to Rexroth and Patchen that was claimed for him. In his Catholic work, Brother Antoninus has moved impressively toward a more central position: a tentative bridging of the chasm in our culture, where a writer like Henry James appears to stare imponderably across at a writer like Whitman.*

Yet, Brother Antoninus belongs with the Whitmans; and an Age of Criticism which has adulated Henry James ("'I've made a discovery! Isn't it thrilling? / He's as good as Stendhal,' cried Lionel Trilling. / With a rumble-de-bum and a pifka-pafka / Came the fife-and-drum corps parading for Kafka.") has tended to ignore the more expansive kind of American writer. The poems of Brother Antoninus challenge the claims of the prevailing climate of critical opinion. The excessively formalist reviewers, unable to account for their rude power, have been quick to label such poems "Dionysian" and, even, "formless." Yet they have a quality which can conquer the recalcitrant reader. Buttressed by moral theology and by depth psychology, Brother Antoninus' massive investigation of the Ecstasy and the Anguish of the life wholly given to God is of incalculable value to our age and to Catholic culture everywhere. You must read him en masse, *as you read Whitman or Jeffers or Claudel, in an entranced condition, while the relentless periods move with a primitive and impressive music, while the interlaced lines of the bardic visionary crash and subside with the intolerable power of the sea.*

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THE HAZARDS OF HOLINESS

I. The Beheading of John the Baptist

And when the daughter of the same Herodias had come in,
and had danced, and had pleased Herod
and them that were at table with him,
the king said to the damsel: Ask of me what thou wilt,
and I will give it thee.

—St. Mark's Gospel

JOHN CRIED OUT—the excoriate definition
Of the invincibly sane. Naked adultery and the greed of cast
Lolled notorious in the royal sheets. The true tongue damned it.
Herodias, that corrosive female wrath,
Black grasp of the invidious breed,
Blanched, swore blooded reprisal.
But the Tetrarch, sensitive, winnowing those careful
Cross-fertilizing fears, that tease of the politic heart,
Smelled dangerous fire in the prophet's blood,
Checked his hand. Dungeoned deep, a claw of conscience
Repressed in the brutal heart of the State,
The Baptist dreamed implacably on,
Manacled but unmaimed.

Salome danced.
Night of the tentative April moon,
A great guest-gathering, the air
Stung with the lingering shiver of winter,
Zoned out of torrents and the freeze of caves.
She danced through the great encircling fires,
Among the lounging electrified troops.
This the Machaerus, steep fortress,
Stained with the gullied blood of invasion
And the howling native pang. Below: oblivion,
The salt-festered sink of the Dead Sea,
Sodom's crusted containment. She danced, pubescent,
In the heart's early ungovernable rage,
The fateful foot now perilously in quest,
Sentient of an indued splendor,
Path of the mortal wound.

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"Give me the head
Of John the Baptist!" cried the violent girl,
Her eyes like an eaglet's blazing behind her unbrooched hair.
Her mouth insolent with wine, throat panting
Those great covetous gouts that howk toward murder,
The dauntless breast beating that oath up out of her blood,
Her sovereign demand. "On a plate! On a plate!"
She turned, imperious, her legs spread like a man's,
One naked arm distended, the savage bracelets
Aclash on her wrist. The Tetrarch, hooked,
Brooded momently over his cup of death.
Truly, this grieved him. Looking plaintively round
He smiled, squirmed, lifted the hand of lifeless assent,
Concurred. Axe-chopped, the sublime features,
That had stared down priests and the brutality of queens,
Rolled in the mire, a girl's wild wish.
She had danced, had she not? Twirling her loose skirt,
The nubile thighs flashing the ringlets of excitation,
Flamboyant, the inflammable gestures of a crude sexuality
Nascently alive, a virgin gambling away her maidenhood
In the crouched animality of arrested stupration,
That thrust of blood in the heart's valves when treasure is spewed,
The toothed heels stuttering out a mirthless crescendo,
Rapacity unflexed, the impossible strut of childish excess,
Astute circlings of consanguinity, most ancient of inversions,
Blood calling to the blood.

Clash the spears, warriors,
Throw down those drinking goblets onto the stones,
You sunburned fighters, swart treaders of Asia,
Dirk-fierce drinkers of barbarous life—behold your own.
She danced. This is the night of her ruined girlhood.
She has earned it. She swirls the vesture of saints
For her scarves. The blood has bellowed. That Herodian lust
Burns already in the narrow groin, not long to be slaked.
On a plate, held high, tilted to the arrogant zest of life,
The great face of the innocent rides somberly in,
Black-mouthed, a terrible hole of condemnation cracked in the jaw,
Rebuking the confrontation of ecstasy and sin,
The dangerous edge teetering yet in those coinless eyes.
Into these disbelieving hearts, these faithless sallow souls,

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The intrepid face thrusts its spleenless accusation, one final time.
Strutting, the outrageous, excessive girl confronts them,
Brandishing into the aghast male faces flattened on the nexus
Of the opposed female will, her bloody pledge.
"Look!" her exultant eyes, her flaunting indemnable lips
Exact it. "This is my trophy! I have asked
What none before me has dared! I dance henceforth
In the image of saints! I possess my desire!"

Nobody laughed.
In the choked silence someone kicked a musician, and the zither
Screeched, a shrill hysterical bleat of masculine consternation.
Smouldering, her face flushed with aggression and contempt,
The umbrageous girl flounced menacing out, dragging her prize.
Her mother had won.

Northward on straw, beside another mountain.
Over against another sea, slept one, the latchet of whose shoe
Even the Baptist flattered to free. His dream dredged deep,
Seeing in time profanations more vile than the prophet's wage
Heaped on the platters of human forbearance.
Let the far tides fall. Let all the world's rivers
Run down to the sea. Jesus dreamed on straw
The inexorable prescience of the lurid fact.
The killed visage, clenched in the hands of the grinning girl,
Stared out the timelessness of the real,
Beholding nothing at all it had not foreseen
Many years back, in the womb, when the weak limbs,
Sphered in those lapsing waters of life, that fertile
Plangent sea, sprang the upsurgent body against those walls
As the truth shocked through, sharp in that trance
As a sent sign; as stones, struck under water,
Pierce to the swooning drowner's ear, rouse him urgently up . . .
So did John joy. In his wild womb-dance
He broke the stupor that obsessed the race,
Ancient of doom, the hauteur of the human province
Clamped like an ice-cap on the surd heart;
The thaw of a sublimity that would soon, on his birth,
Unseal forever the sleep-dragged eyes, disburden
The breast of its fierce remorse,
And loose the vein of the tremendous tongue
That would thunder in the Redemption.

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II. Judith and Holofernes

Then said Holofernes unto her
"Drink now, and be merry with us."
Judith said, "I will drink now, my lord,
because my life is magnified in me this day
more than all the days since I was born."
—The Book of Judith

Saint Judith crouched. About her loins
the instructed provocation of the harlot's intelligence
Or the widow's pang: the smouldering
Anticipatory inflection, flat nimbus of explicit consent,
Reckless awesomeness of the traducer's perversity
In the discipline of the saint.

Did a demon sodden the conqueror's brain,
Dredged with black wine, or was it an angel?
Holofernes, watching her fool with his cumbrous gear,
Would never know. She dragged the cutlass out of its sheath,
Gravely impressed, mocking over its honed edge,
Her dusked eyes darkening: "When the sword of my lord
Bites blood, in the mad battle, let my hope sing it home . . ."
She toyed with it, binding her scarf on the ponderous hilt
For favor, fondling the pendulous tassels she found there,
Curling finger and thumb round the thirsting point,
A spidery tickle. "Let it bring down the proud,
For which I have come to you, a woman's weakness
In the stitch of God's grace . . ."
She mocked her mouth at him over its edge,
The razor-stroked steel. "When my lord
Has pinked at last his terrible blade
I will quench my desire . . ." The conqueror grinned,
Lolling his muscular hams on their print,
The double indentation of crushed cushions,
Where his strong legs spread, and blinked sidewise.
"Promise," she mocked, "when my lord
Has blooded his terrifying blade, he will not forget
Where he learned his secrets . . ."

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Outside in the camp
The cohorts slumped in sleep, collapsed on their weapons,
Above the bed, that deceptive keep of obsidional debauchery,
Where the master-plan of covert assault lay stretched and waiting,
A small lamp-flame dangerously flirted, sulked on its wick,
Twisting about like a snake's torso flexing to strike.
The great silks of the tent enveloped them,
In the voluminous silence of fortuitous stealth.
The camp lay dead. They alone looked to each other,
Contained in the gaze of engrossed betrayal,
And each banked passion—he, the inveterate rapacity
Of the nerve's conquistorial itch; she, the indominate rigor
Of the martyr's faith, who looks in the lion's distended jaw
And never flinches. For each, obsessedly fixed on the other's eyes,
Straining to drink foreknowledge of their fate's face,
This instant was all. And they swayed there, like mating snakes,
Sustained in the teeth of a supreme detachment,
Loth to dispel it, too wise
In the strategems of hate and desire
To seize too soon.

"You understand," she said to him gravely,
"Something of what a woman is, I can see that."
(The light on her loins, the numinous fire
Fluxing out of her breasts' slow fall.)
"I am not the first in my lord's life,
Being but a poor late-comer here,
Where others have lain, glad to make of their body a bed
For the chief's ease. Where are they now?
But how could they regret it? Perhaps my lord,
When he gives me leave, will find my gift,
Among his memorable accomplishments, not too
Utterly inconsequential, not too
Tiresomely trite?"

She stirred, ruthless,
Projecting out of all her surfaces
The tyranny of her truth.

And the conqueror smiled.
A woman of brains and sensibilty; he respected that.
In his cagey respect, rooted down in his being's base,

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That seminal propensity engendered in flux
Its thick provocation, the measure of the male.
Let her choose her time, a subtle mind
In a serpentine body, and when she chose it
The time, he knew, would be richer for that.

He drank deep, the aura of suggestibility
And the smouldering anticipation the sense stirs,
When a man expects what he holds already in the seething brain,
Excites the profile of deranged rapture,
Rush and roll of the blood plunged, the explicit
Female debouchment, so long allured and at last relinquished,
And the groin's crude grunt. He smiled, drinking again,
Compulsively, nursing his sodden tactical hunch,
Drinking and waiting, the sovereign passion
Spreading down in his deeps, a sleepy fire.

God uses the devil, Job proved that. But does the devil
Use God? Holofernes, headless in hell,
Will twist forever on the demon's nail,
Crucified on the splayed tree of the sexual act,
Ejaculating out of the dismasted shoulders
The orgiastic splurge of neuric excess.
Here, in his wantonest moment, the demon within him
Slumbered and slept, drugged down with wine,
Stupefied in the clog of diffused consciousness,
The guzzle of omniverous thirst.
But the angel that lit her ecstatic face,
Limned with an exquisite ravishment,
Perfecting on the lips and the sinuous body
The delineaments of unspeakable gluttings,
The giddiness of delight in the shamelessness of grace—
This angel creates, and in the discrepant achievement
Out-does the devil. Holofernes, divided on his own blade,
His swart head slewed back and chopped off,
Hewn loose in two hacks, and the bloated trunk
Stiffening in the cerement of his own arras
His head balled up, stashed away in a woman's purse,
Never again to gloat in triumph on the proud neck
When battles are joined and maids deflowered,

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Sings his own requiem, the terrified bellow
Of distempered blood. O what angel of angels
Steeled the widow's wrist, purged it of weakness,
Hardened the voluptuous forearm for its zig-zag crunch,
Endowing in the suave insinuative shoulder
The dint of Samson, and made all muscle the supple stern,
That had promised to tuck like a frisking minx
His wild uncircumcized pang—what angel enveloped her
When she squatted and struck, the cutlass
Slammed down and hacked through, the exposed jugular
Writhing back from the steel, as a garden snake
Frenzies under a woman's hoe
When she hews her greens in the wind-wade of spring—
All about the bull body, sacrificial,
The mithraic cadence of spent libido,
His legs asprawl, and the sprawled sex,
That would never again bleed a virgin's seal,
Dabbed with slick blood . . .

O ravishment of God
On the unspeakable face of the transfixed Jewess,
Awesome in its divine righteousness, its terrible truth,
To stand at last, like Salome alone, a man's head
Gripped in her hands!

Grieve you warriors!
Mourn your loss you great men of battle,
Blood-drunk dukes of carnivorous life,
Out there on the mesa, asleep on your spears,
Bedeviled by dreams of women and gods!
The moon steals over the stupefied camp, crisply,
And blesses at last the besieged city,
Softening the contours of warfare and weather,
Erasing the scars of violence, hate, the perverse tribulation
Of energic despair, atoning at last
In its delicate presence the harsh male madness
And the spoilage of man. The strange woman
Glides through the camp like a young goddess
Bearing her gifts, back through the thorn
And the desert gravel, over the flints,

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Picking her way through camel dung and the urine of mules,
Drifting back to the beleaguered city that gave her birth,
Where the greybeard fathers, impotent,
Sit on their mats, invoking the inscrutable God,
Of whom in fact they have quite despaired,
To make in this hour some bland interpolation,
Discover within their obscure hearts,
Blind with the anxiousness of earth
And the libidinous rage that terrors their days,
The germ of rebirth, purging from their souls
The fraudulent thirst of the sword's conceit,
The furious grudge of His seige.

54 E. ANTHONY, BLACK STAR

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Pages From An Unpublished Autobiography

I: *FRIAR*

IT IS DEEP NIGHT, autumn, 1953. In the cloister garth the herbs, boxwood and ivy and the lank selal, wrapped in the thick, warmth-retaining darkness of their autumnal foliage, reach out their limbs to draw the last vigor of the year, and from their secretive pores they yield that indefinable odor of the season, half-wild, interrogative and mysterious as the whispering of time, to question and inform the dark, the mingling testimonial of the profferance of seed. The monastery, shrouded in the depths of its recollection, gathers into focus the diffuse consciousness of its correlated lives. It is a Dominican House of Studies, and I, a Lay Brother, contingent to that study but not engaged in it, pause in my rounds to taste a moment of the translucent night, grateful for its goodness, its wise regardful stars.

And standing among these autumn-laden herbs I let my mind lift over the monastery roof, slate-steep, jutted with gables and the high-flung cross; lift over the oaks outside; lift over the endless avenues lacing the narrow shelf of earth between the moulded hills and the eastern edge of the Bay. Westward the lights of San Francisco dapple the tranquil shore. I see them every night from my cell high in the monastery, a myriad glitter, uncountable. Northward the Sacramento, draining the inland valley and the immense watershed beyond, spends itself in the Bay, crossed and recrossed by its bridges arching their lanes of traffic high in the voiding night. Beyond reclines the Pacific, swart, resistant, unquenchable to the mind, and deeper than man yet knows. Beside it, hugging the Bay like a harlot clasping a sleeper, the city murmurs its insolent provocation, hectic under its flotsam lights, its water-woven mists, flushed with the fantastic vision it holds of its own uniqueness, restlessly stirring the hunger of its unfulfillable wish.

And the great secular age, the strident and profane creation of free thought and humanistic sufficiency, lifts itself up to its sanguinary consummation, more shrill and intense than any which preceded it, more corrupt because more complacent, more vulnerable because more complex, vitiated by more grandiose dreams, cutting itself off from the earth by the institution of the machine as the great civilizations of the past cut themselves off from the institution of slavery; and in the cutting, losing more and more of its interior unity, that frail ghost of its Christian past, utterly fragmenting; and as the fragmentation sets in, striving, as invariably occurs, for the purely mechanical unity of enforcement: Caesar's necessitous expedient. Everywhere the torque toward mere mechanical unity intensifies; the passivity of the East solidifying into the terrible blood-stained emphasis of economic collectivism; the activism of the West narrowing into the insane intensity of technological concentration, each in its over-simplification scanting the vision of a transcendant God etched on the heart of man.

THE NIGHT, LIKE A CONDOR'S WING, vast and unruffled, holds over the monastery. From a side door the Novice Lay Brothers emerge into the cloister and make their way 'round toward the chapel for their evening prayers. They whisper. I see only the white sides of their tunics blur between the arches, their black scapulars one with the gloom. They will kneel in the denser dark of the chapel and say the Rosary, their voices rising and falling in liquid accents. They are very young, and have tasted almost nothing of the implacable war of that world; but it will come to them, as it comes always to the innocence of life, clarifying it, obtruding upon the rapture of its vision the necessity of choice, temptation and faith grappling together in the interstices of the being, the world's battle plunged into the very depths of the soul. They are not aware. The peace of the cloister, the peace of the monastery hangs huge and unruffled, hovering the dark.

And I lift up my eyes to the rows of windows where, each in his cell, the young clerics lean above their texts, bringing their minds to bear upon the mystery of knowledge unresolved. They too are young, these Student Brothers, but more formed now, and growing into the deep integration of manhood. Soon they will be priests. For seven years they give themselves to the absorption and mastery of knowledge and the deep formation of prayer; the formation of the liturgy and

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the common life, and the contemplative's unceasing commitment; and for the rest of their lives they will spend it. If they are true Dominicans they will die exhausted, expunged of the ineluctable burden of truth; will die on that line where the violence of the world and the violence of God engage each other, to be transformed by that violence into the vast tranquillity of Heaven.

And faintly, off there in the city, I hear the hourstroke of the carillon high in the distant Campanile. The University is closing down its lights for the night, its students trailing off into the eucalyptus darkness, boy with girl, books bunched under their arms, lingering. Its Professors swing down from the great library stacks to waiting automobiles, wheel toward home in the Berkeley hills and a book by an autumnal fireside to round out the long day of their knowledge. A good life, and a useful one, and for many deeply enviable. But I, a friar, musing in my cloister, who had only to move through the life of secular learning to find it not whole, have turned in here to a deeper integration. But yet the University is there, with its own validity, and its own vision of the Truth; and insofar as it is true we also are bound to it. For though the Franciscans, whom I envy, take by instinct to the wilderness, the Dominicans have always planted their houses by the great centers of learning. Who remembers now the days when the Friars dominated the intellectual life of Europe, St. Thomas and St. Albert delivering from behind the most renowned lecterns in the world? They are quite vanished. And almost as a direct consequence of that neglect (I mean the repudiation of the God-centered man from the halls of learning), on a hill over the Campanile bulks the dome of the Cyclotron, that womb of the Bomb, the weapon of the man-eating atom. Are we then bound as well to *that?* Indeed we are. That is our time, our century. The monastery was conceived as counter to the actual world, the world as it exists, in whatever century, and it cannot relinquish its function.

And in the cloister dark, in the monastic solitude, possessed of that comprehension, I ponder the leaf-fall, summer's lingering devolution, ponder the fall of seed, the fall of life, ponder the disjunctured human violence, and the mind's flight beyond. And suddenly, over the cloister wall, like a kind of fatal confirmation, shrill and intense as the screech of an unclean demon, floats the high wail of a siren. Off there, in the tangled web of the city, an ambulance is threading its way down the long arterial to some congested intersection, where disaster perches on the twisted steel, over the smashed glass and the running blood. And there flashes across my mind, made lurid now by cumulative terror, the vision of those mute bystanders huddled in fascination about a spot on the asphalt, a focal area of concentrated pain. And the mind gags on revulsion, confronted with the city's ugly enormous abstractness, where human value dies in the mass and is made nothing, the intense episode seen merely as one of the vast organism's local agonies, no more than some spasmodic clot of reaction, an automatic reflex twitching a ganglion.

But the heart fights free. What suffers out there on the asphalt is the anguish of a soul, shorn of its bodily amplitude, and face to face with death. It is hard enough to pray for an age, much less the ganglion's abstract reaction, the jerk of a tortured nerve, but a *soul* draws prayer like a magnet draws iron. And under his scapular the heart of the friar grapples the invocation and finds its mode, is delivered up to it, the whole grasp of his function. In the heart of the Christian, pain and the individual anguish find their tortuous center, and he draws it into himself in that act of willed approximation which is the thing he is sent to do, his act of worth, perhaps his deepest usefulness. In his heart's own torment, the world's anguish is taken up and finds its hospital, its rehabilitation, the act of mercy and comprehension, which is his prayer.

Now the siren tracks down its destination, and its wail hangs hushed. And before it begins again, back on the merciful homeflight, the monastery draws upon itself its immemorial silence, its deep ingesting peace. The herbs, boxwood and ivy and the lank selal, drink of their sustenance, drink of the earth's bestowal, and the air's clean gift. The hour, spent now, dissolves into its aftermath, and the night glides on.

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II: *POET*

AND ONCE AGAIN I let my gaze probe into the close darkness of the garden, and taste with my nostrils the gifts of its beneficent herbs. High and deep lifts the night, hanging above the small lemon trees, the privet hedges and the ivied plots. I can see the stars shiver in the small earth-bound sky of the garden pool, where a stone dryad clasps in her childish arms the shape of an up-wriggling fish, and I am grateful that the obscuration of the dark relieves me from considering again its dulcet figuration. The entire garden is conceived in the pattern, if hardly the perfection, of the Italian Renaissance, and in my sojourn here it has filled me with distinct repugnance. From the first I judged it more fit for the resorts of that world out there than for the very heart of a Dominican monastery. In a cloister I wanted nothing more for vegetation than the long-bladed cactus that grows in the desert. I wanted it set in otherwise denuded earth, with one of those unforgettable Spanish crucifixes dominating the center. I wanted everything here to evoke, call up and project, yes, cry out the Passion and Death of Our Lord Christ Jesus, King and Redeemer of men, that we might be called hourly to our own passion, that death of self, that redemption of the interior man, in the eternal crucifixion which is the life of man in God.

It is this attitude, doubtless, which confirms me as the complete rigorist, an attitude accountable, I am told, in terms of my particular past, and forgiven with it, but with the very forgiveness discounted and ignored. How, I wonder sardonically, does one defend oneself against an epithet? Are these "born Catholics" so omniscient that their most complacent opinion approximates the authority of an infallible definition? This Irish-American clerical mentality, stabilized in a convenient *modus vivendi* with middle-class respectability, does it, perchance, constitute the august Magisterium of the Church? I spit upon the ground, disgusted, and turn aside.

And having yielded this much I cannot check myself, and suddenly my heart convulses in an upsurge of blistering pride and resentment, that leaves me choked in a spasm of dangerous contempt. It is the pathetic liability of the *donatus:* unstable, rootless, unattached, essentially unbelonging. And then the anger leaches away into pure self-pity, and I am spent in the hopeless sequence of uncheckable emotion, riddled and confused. Where has all my vaunted monastic certitude fled to, I, an utter anachronism, with my fake medieval attitudinizing in a modern cloister? I recall how one of our parish priests, returned to the monastery for the annual retreat, cocked a thumb my way as I stalked hooded about the chapel and asked, *sotto voce*, "Whom have we here, pray tell, Ephraim the Deacon?" I suck in my breath, all badgered sensibility, and hug my sides.

BUT ABOUT ME THE MONASTERY, withdrawn and unwitnessing, keeps its peace, and makes no comment. That immemorial silence, ancient with the contemplative wisdom of two thousand Christian years, maintains the free simplicity of its mode. The monastic life has witnessed many such outbursts as mine in its long past and has made no judgment, knowing its slow silence will heal all, knowing its peace will pervade after the imperfect lives of every generation of monks and friars that it sees nourished and fulfilled and laid in the earth, are gone. And I perceive that the monastery is in fact not so much a physical object, a structure or dwelling place, but rather a *condition*, a spiritual perspective, an attitude, a transcendant motive, beyond all the temporal appurtenances of its material composition, so that we bring to it, each of us, our individual conformation, and are each transformed.

And I, wretched rigorist, shake myself, and wonder how so nebulous a thing as a man's past can make so great a difference between him and his Brothers. What is it I see that they do not? What is it they accept that I cannot? Things, to them, are more or less as they should be; but I, emerged from my past, renounced all that, renounced it once and for all at great cost; and the knowledge of renunciation envelops me, and I ask myself piteously if I gave up so much to rest in so temperate an equation. The past is dead. But if the past is dead indeed, what lives on? What

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compelling memory infects the roots of the being, and shapes the man to its bias, twisting the receptivity of the new to the hard deformation of the old? What course foredooms the mind to its unconscious rigorism (if rigorism it be), and in the definition invalidates the value, makes a falseness of the true?

That past! That past! "It is memory that prophesies, prophecy that remembers!" And in the memory's muscular engagement the spent years surge across me, and all those violations, the hysterical acts of a soul fractured with conceit, with error, and the misjudging mind, perch vultured on my shoulder. And in their aftermath I turn my thought to the rough draft of that indeterminate book, which is all memory, the story of the *thrust*, where it lies now, on the table in my cell, earnestly begun, but far indeed from finished. It is the story of a conversion, a conversion as manifested in the poetry it occasioned. The conversion has been accomplished, and for all its consequences and its excruciating choices, it lies behind me in the indefinite contour of past event. Nothing remains to show now but the poetry, and what is that? Something of the energy is contained there, but also something of the shapelessness, something persisting in the mystery of form, the mystery which blankets and obscures the outline of its temporality, but somehow releases the abiding energy, the force, and the inherent motive that made the act what it was.

And I am taken back in my mind to that other autumn, when all the latent consequence was drawing to a head. It was Advent, 1948, and the time drew down to the winter solstice. I was writing out the last poems of *The Residual Years*, that long chronicle of my guilts, my old allegiances and my deep betrayals. I had begun it fifteen years before, a few tentative pages of verse established out of the needs of early manhood, and then built poem by poem over the decade and a half of war and peace that held the centering quest of my life. Publishing it at first as I could, in slim sheaves, under various titles, I was largely unaware of what was shaping, but I gradually gained a sense of its continuity; until at last these collections were gathered up and issued under the final generic name, to form a kind of comprehensive edition, not complete in itself, and with much more to come, but yet the looming bones of the thing apparent enough.

The Residual Years, then, is a work of slow accumulation, but what for me emerges out of the flight of time is the blood-line in it, the ancient Viking heritage of my father, that quintessential Nordic sorrow, mood of the fens, of the fjords, and the remorseless Arctic Sea, which shaped in pain the spirit of his people, and which all the blaze of California sun could not in me extinguish. For it is in fact only the earth-emphasis, the mood of primal and latter-day paganism, a paganism which, no matter in what century it appears, late or soon, evokes out of man only his ultimate futility, and the blind, unhoping quest for his fulfillment. It is the sign of *Wyrd*, the ancient Scandinavian concept of implacable destiny. Under that sign I had written: *Do you not doubt, being lonely of heart, / The fate that so forces? / Men doubling on death deny with their eyes / The joy that drew them . . .* This was its theme, the heart of that saga, chanted over and over, the long groundswell of *The Residual Years*.

And back and forth, modulating the groundswell, the other influences rose and fell away, and wrought upon it their transient figuration. There was the baffling complex of familial issue and unfulfillment: my father, the restless Norwegian musician, one who might almost be called a latter-day wandering *scald*, a man of strange and thwarted genius, closed in a forbidding mixture of compulsive rages and matchless personal integrity, savage agnosticism and unbending civic rectitude; and over against him the modulating Celtic softness of my mother, fundamentally religious, intelligent, poetic, affectionate; between them creating an imbalance that filled the soul of their son with a throttled intensity, but tempering it as well in a context of earnest sincerity, social responsibility and the purposiveness of truly Christian ideals. It is the unconscious struggle between *Wyrd* and Christ that tightens the pitch of *The Residual Years*.

And there is also that other ambivalence, the long frustration with her whom I found in ado-

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lescence, clung to, and made in time a marriage; a marriage that broke in the long ruination of the war, through which as an Objector I endured its years of denial, and joined the heart of that loss to the great unfulfillment until it seemed to make of it one prolonged moan, the caught breath and the outgone sigh of deprivation, the overtone and the undertone, the long threnody of *The Residual Years*.

And last, and most consequential, the final years with her, who, born Catholic, married in the Church and fallen from the Church, yet made with me the second mating, and gave me to know what a fuller maturation of earthly love could mean; who with a kind of holy fierceness born of her fierce inward need, clarified the twisted ambivalence and doubt that had become my heart, and out of that clarification brought me to the threshold of the Faith.

AND NOW THE DARKNESS is probed by the single note of a bell. It is time for the chanting of Matins and Lauds. Up in the *Studentate* the young friars are forming their twin lines; and soon I can see them through the narrow windows, descending the switchback of the stairs, the hood over the head, and the white scapular dancing before and behind, floating out from the movement of the feet, which gives the light and buoyant tread that somehow catches up the indefinable blitheness, the gaiety of the Order; and as they descend they intone between them the *De Profundis*, that ancient, unsurpassable Psalm; so that the delight of life and the poignancy of death, the unflinching concentration on essentials which is the centrality of the Dominican vision, float down as I stand in the cloister, here in the autumnal shrubbery, with the season, in its speechless manifestation, pervading its quality in the advancing night.

Now the chapel lights go on, and from the other side of the house the priests are coming in, in ones and twos, dropping the hood back as they emerge into the cloister, and saluting each other gravely before they too disappear into the chapel. Inside, by now, all have taken their places, facing each other in the two banked rows of the oak-wood choir-stalls; and they kneel there, and in the hush of an expectancy hung on the verge of a magnificent articulation, they await the bell that will begin them once more upon the centuries' old recitative that is the *Choral Office*, in which the contemplative restores in the Divine Chant the focus of soul that is the life of the spirit in God. I look up into the unsearchable witness of the night. The stars repose there, sustained in a vastness beyond comprehension. It is almost time for the bell. I move to join them, and as I pass out of the cloister-garth and into the hushed interior of the chapel, I leave the night to its witness.

III: *CONVERSION*

IN THE AUTUMN OF 1948, I read St. Augustine's *Confessions*. It was a book I might have encountered earlier with nothing more than admiration, but because of the ripening of my life, it was made, when I came to it, my own book. Not only did I perceive my soul there, but it let me see something of the true stature of this baffling belief that had challenged my old incertitude: those elusive elements that are almost the last things to come to you, the mysticism and the mind. In St. Augustine the Faith became for me what I most desperately needed—a man's religion; but it was a thing that had as yet no correlation in my own life. I could see it in the book; I could not see it in the Church. I began to seek to find the mysticism of the book, and it was this that brought me more and more willingly into the churches. I still had no comprehension of the Mass; it remained a thing closed to me. I went, as I say, because she went, because she told me the mysticism was there, in the mystery of the Mass. I hoped to find what she had found, what the book had promised.

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AND IT CAME ABOUT that we decided to attend midnight Mass, that Christmas of 1948, in the Cathedral across the Bay, the first Christmas since the disorders of the war years that this custom was resumed. The nuns had prepared the Crib to one side of the sanctuary, with fir trees banked about a miniature stable. And as I sat in that familiar estrangement of feeling which had never left me in the Catholic churches, there came to me the resinous scent of the fir trees. It cut across everything else my senses had to contend with in that place, there in the heart of the great alien city, far from my early home and the reassuring simplicity of my old life. That scent was the only thing I could seize on with anything like true realization, but this time it did not raise in me the passion of rebellion it certainly would once have done. Now out of the greatness of my need I sensed in it something of a verification, a kind of indeterminate warrant that I need not fear, were I to come to the Christ, that He would exact the dreaded renunciation of my natural world. On the contrary it was His, His own, of His making, for me to take, by which I might be brought to know the complexity of the means that are His. It was there in the Cathedral, mixed in a faint odor of incense, like a tantalization, wooing me to probe back behind the facade of appearances, the externals of things in which His might is couched, to seek for the reality that lay behind them all.

I could look with my eyes to the place from which I knew the scent was coming, the somnolent odor of forests, and I saw in the miniature stable the several statuettes, and I recognized there the figures of the shepherds. As shepherds, as Orientals, they had no relation to anything authentic in my life, save perhaps the Christmases of long ago and the yearning suspense of childhood. What was all this to me, I reflected, as I often did before these things in my puzzlement, what was all this to me who had never so much as seen a shepherd? But hold. That scent in the air, it was taking me back into a past where something powerful and obscure was being enacted again within me; and searching there I saw the correlation. It was the sheepherders. Who were they? Dark Basques or Mexicans, watching their flocks on the great flats west of Fresno, or taking their way into

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the foothills and slopes of the sierra, or coming down again in autumn to graze the edges of vineyard country. And then those Navajos I had seen long ago, out there on the high New Mexican mesa, their impenetrable faces grouped around that campfire, staring without motion into the embers while the old prospector told us of their lore.

And suddenly, traced back on the long scent of the fir branches, I saw the sheepherder in the shepherd, and the shepherd came alive. And the meaning of the Incarnation, the meaning of the Birth, in terms of the sheepherder, as I remembered him, began to widen within me. In the folklore of the West the sheepherder is certainly of all types the most low. Half-crazed, it is thought, with solitude, and hence impenetrably ignorant, unfit for any more likely employment and in consequence depraved, he has become, in the obscene humor of the smoking room, a kind of minor rural god of the vice of sodomy. I too had relished this sort of vile humor, but nevertheless I had never lost my respect for his dignity, and for the occupation that took him straight to the heart of the wilderness which I, in boyhood and in manhood, had virtually worshiped.

SO THERE WAS TRULY a deep and powerful bond between us, the sheepherder and I, though I had forgotten him. What I saw now was that he stood on the verge of the Mystery. For some obscure reason, hidden within the frame of the Event, he had been touched, and I sensed that the demarcation was not merely fortuitous. But what was the thing that made him so eminently liable, gave him that unconscious candidacy for the divine? Was it mere ignorance? It could hardly be innocence, standing there in the complicity of his earthly sins, as inveterate as Adam and as culpable as Cain. Was it simply that he was common as dirt, "the perdurable fellahin," prime specimen of the Great Unwashed? In a churchful of Solid Citizens, he was as incongruous as a sheepdog at a dance, and the sympathetic incongruity of mind and manner yoked us together. In the essence of his utter simplicity, his total lack of pretension, he stood there, ripe with the odor of sheepdung and juniper twigs, mutton grease and fir resin, and I recognized him. When a few days later I came to write *The Uncouth*, that was the underlying force of it, seated in such ancient affinities, making it what it is.

But there was more at work here than the genesis of a single poem. For one thing, that night saw the fashioning of a bridge, a mode of transference from the involvement of the past to the requirement of the future. There is a time when, after the logical structure of the Faith has been perceived, its truth acceded to, its use affirmed; when the insufficiency of one's past is wholly realized, and the sufficiency of the Church has been gradually discerned—still, there remains a final blankness of those areas of association which make in the mind the living thing a religion must be, and until this blankness is spanned it is not possible to shape the deep assent a whole faith requires. And it was the odor of the fir, the memory of sheepdung and mutton grease, cutting across the closed interior air of the Cathedral, that transformed the shepherd into the sheepherder, and brought me with him to my knees at the Crib. In the choosing of the sheepherder I too would be chosen, and in this choosing, this bringing, this bridging, would be dispelled the old anxiety I spoke of, the fear that the acknowledgement of the Christ, who somehow had remained in my imagination as a kind of sacerdotal decoration, a roofed-over church-god, would deprive me of that fullness of religious response relative purely to Earth, the natural kingdom and the great sustaining Cosmos, the only religion I had ever had. For it had been pantheism, mistaking effect for cause, rather than atheism, asserting effect without cause, which had all those years secured my adherence.

AND GAZING NOW across the multitude between me and the sanctuary I saw the tabernacle, set back upon the altar, contained in its own reservation, as mysterious and impenetrable as some thoughtless stone. "Unknown God," I said to myself, "What can you be that I should come here and wait for your word? If the hills and the sky and the stars have not spoken, what hope from you? O lifeless bread housed in the lifeless bronze! If the vast cosmic god hears not, nor cares, why should any man speak to you?"

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We had genuflected, on entering, as I had learned to do, and then I had knelt a moment beside her, not merely to conform, but to see if perhaps in the approximation of the empty act the thing might be evoked; but I soon sank sighing back on the pew, as if even so little an effort as this were too much to expend. She herself had kept kneeling, as was her custom, and now in the sight of her presence there at the margin of my vision, I became conscious again of that special quality she seemed always to possess in such moments: the character of a subdued but vibrant expectancy, as of one waiting, fastened upon an interior alertness; the body tensile with a hushed and quickening excitement; the head bent slightly forward in the listener's attitude; the neck, seen from the side and behind, arched with a poised presentment; and the heavy hair, coifed, caught up and coiled under the scarlet turban. What mystery, I wondered, what revelation did she wait for, something which in its very expectation sealed me off in my plight? What does she wait for, when she waits like this, kneeling, contained within the ineluctable principle of that femininity, out of the knowledge of its very incompleteness made receptive and serene? What does she see there, sense there, across the infinity of the nothingness that faces man? Is it a mystery the soul of woman is made to meet? A mystery the mind of the male, in its terse abstractness, can never truly grasp? Is it a woman's wisdom, a woman's necessity (I idly toyed the question), unreal for any man?

Any man? I asked it again, like an echo, turning my gaze back toward the crib. Can it be true even of the primitive, in all his subjectivity, in all his celebrated intuition? But the vision of those sheepherders, impassive, crouched there on the cold sheep-flats outside Bethlehem struck through me, before the inconsequential question could find its rebuttal. I saw the ridges flecked with frost, the wind crumbling the ruined darkness, blowing the bronze dust of the Ammonite, and the flake of the Babylonian bone. And the vision of the sheepherder became the tragic vision of the race, cut off from finality by the unwitnessing layer of darkness that has no edge. And in the hovering night of that vindictive upreaching void an immense terror dropped over me. I remembered all the wildernesses I had known, the measureless night, and sensed their plight out there, those primitives, those sheepherders, watching their beasts through the jackal-haunted blackness, huddling a blaze.

And it rose now, that void, empty and foreboding through the tall lofts of my imagination. It rose over the cathedral, over the city, over the long ribbon of coast, over the continent, breathing and vast on the web of the waters, over the great dream-sunken hemisphere and the planetary earth itself, up into ultimate heights where no life is, ever, and the nameless galaxies grope their way through deserts of space that will never be probed. And sustained in those altitudes the winter constellations walk their great way, bearing yet the fabulous names the Greeks had given them, back there, so long ago, before the time of the epoch of Christian man: Orion and Taurus, Andromeda and Perseus, Cassiopeia and Draco; and the great Ursa, circling forever that nailhead of the North. The Greeks had given them names indeed, but how pathetic! We in our enlightenment know that the gods are dead, the stars no more than titanic blobs of fire, unthinkably vast, and going nowhere.

And the terrible universal enmity, set against the isolate human heart, came into me, and the loneliness of man, trapped in a universe he cannot subdue. Westward that hostile, man-hating sea throws its storms upon all coasts, chews its islands, smashes its ships, breeds its interminable, indissoluble fog. It will be coming in soon, I reckoned, that low invection, that sundering sea-hugging cloud, blowing through the Gate, running its outrider pennant far up-river to cut off the cliffs. And it will spread sideways, and widen, possess the Bay and all its boats, the wharves and the barges. And the great buoys will mourn in it, sad, soughing their thick and doleful note into the sodden ear of that cloud. And gliding it will possess the houses on the shore, all the peninsular towns. And it will cover the highways, and the fast lanes of traffic will be slowed, and men will die in it. And the long trains will nose through it, crying, those sleek metallic runners, in from Cheyenne, from

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Omaha and Chicago, footing their way cautiously on the dewed iron, anxiously calling ahead to the crossings, crawling between the flexing lights. And the airports will be sealed, the great planes in from the ends of the earth will circle and go elsewhere. And behind the cities the nude heads of the hills will take it too, and the redwood canyons claim it as theirs, for they love it, fog is their element, they drip it endlessly; it is their embrace, their thing of love; and it is beautiful.

But for the men on the Bay, the men in the machines, the pilots and the drivers, those in the long ships creasing the sea, it is not beautiful. Man sets himself over against sea and earth, and they both fight him. The mountain fights him, raiding winter after winter the troublesome road that binds its base, stabbing down its rockslides, smashing its giant pines across that thread. And the river fights him, the dyke-breaker. It drinks rain and breaks out. And the storm fights him, gathering its cyclic strength and hurling itself in on the land. And fog fights him. Crashing on unchartered reefs the split ship shrieks and starts down; deep in its bowels the boilers burst open, disgorging men and metal on the tangled kelp. The crew abandons, pushing off in rafts, riding out the back-surging roil where the hulk sucks under. They drift, float out in the white smother. They call and call across to each other before they divide, before they are lost each to the other, left each alone, the echo of their shout dies out on the water, in the waste of fog.

And the great burden of human life, of the man-life, the great burden of my own life, endless, without End, rose like a vision seen in my heart; and my mind was drenched. And I cried out in my heart at the doom of man, the doom beyond the brute denial as the sea deals it, beyond death as the fog delivers it; the more terrible doom of which these elemental dooms are somehow the type; the real doom of cut-off man dissevered from God, adrift on the raft of earth in a universe of night, a universe of fog, of galactic dust, and no port to make. I had come without knowledge to the root of one of the great historic dilemmas —that teleological liability, that absolute block by which the quest of man is shut from its attainment; the curse that he only, of all seeking things, cannot attain to his needful goal; the curse of man that he alone may never achieve the essentiality for which he was made.

* * *

And then, in a long correlative insight, comprehension was given me. And all the instrumentality of that search—the witness of the woman; the perusal of baffling, halfread books; Mass after Mass sat through in ignorance; all those sermons falling on the deafest ears in Christendom; my false misguided hope; the intensity of search cramped most desperately into my soul, compressed and hardened there in the ferocious pressures of that agony—now all were fused in the instant of my enlightenment. That night, that Christmas Eve in the San Francisco Cathedral, with the sheepherder hunched by his dung-fire outside Bethlehem bitter in the wind of a ruined world, all, all leaped into focus. And the knowledge of the Christ, the power of a stupendous disclosure poured into my heart. I saw that beyond the intellective act of the Greek or the religious one of the Jew, the emergent Christ had spoken, revealing what the combined intelligence of all philosophers, the total aspiration of all worshipers, could never have conceived. In a single act of love and expiation Christ plunged the human soul into the very actuality of God, and quenched it there, and its purified gaze met the gaze of that God, was unified in a single look, made face to face. The mystery is open. Man's thwarted end burns in the glance of an unspeakable Love—it is the Beatific Vision.

For into the human context, into the ignorant heart of the human sheepherder, penetrated the transcendent principle, the Word. In the mystery of flesh God walked the world; healed men, taught men, was nailed to the sky and killed there; tomb-sealed; rose up out of death's mechanistic chaos to touch on sacrificial fullness, and in the mystery of the Church maintains the salvivic principle which makes men of the divine. . . . It is the great renewal a self-offering God casts ever on earth, the immortal fire which finds its kind in the individual heart, and they burn together, they make one blaze.

Suddenly through the spiritual denseness of a man's grossness that Grace is given, and he sees

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the Church as the Incarnate One, and he comes. Upon Her altars Christ flashes the realism of unsubduable God. In the sacrifice of the Mass God stoops and proffers, stoops and proffers, descends, rises, is nailed to the sky. Over and over, spending and redeeming, He is never done. Out of His joy He yields Himself immortally in the supreme act, the Redemption. That wave of restoration drives through the chaos of the world, dissolving sin, dispelling darkness, casting out rancor and evil, killing hate in the human heart. A man is touched. His pride-stiff soul crumbles before an ineffable grace and he comprehends. The once sinister Church, seen only as evil, becomes in a trice the resplendent Mother of Men, the Christ as pure beneficence, and he skips in singing.

Can this be him of whom the common jibe is given: "He fears liberty as much as he needs bondage"? O foolish men! You see darkness where there is light, and light where there is darkness! How long will you hunch in your fears, squatting there on your ancient earth-soiled loins, the fear of those venal loins polluting your vision? How long will you crouch in the servitude of that sexual terror? Day after day Christ on the altar dispels all that, repeats His passion, pours out the running wave of His grace, the flux of His perfection. It would drown your wrath in its vastness, would lift you on its swift upreach, but you clench and resist, you fear. Adam-wise, you prefer your wretched fig-leaves to prime spiritual nakedness, the blazing exposure of a soul made new in God, brought face to face, burned pure in the excoriate gaze of Christ.

I too crouched out there on the sheepflats of man's terrestrial ambiguity, with nothing but the rags of pitiful pride between me and that death, but something was spoken into my soul, and hearing I followed. When the fir-smell reached me across the closed interior air of the Cathedral, binding as it did the best of my past and the best of my future, shaping for the first time that synthesis of spirit and sense I had so needed and never found, I was drawn across, and in the smell of the fir saw it for the first time, not merely as an existent thing, but as a *created* thing, witness of the Word, the divine Logos, who made all earth, and me, a soul in His own image, out of very love. And I saw in the fact of Creation the end of Creation; and in the end of Creation saw indeed the unspeakable Lover who draws the loved one out of the web of affliction, remakes him as His own. It was then that I could rise from the pew, and, following like a hound the trace on the air, go where the little image lay, in the Crib there, so tiny, among the simple beasts, watched over by the cleanly woman and the decent man, and these humble ones, my good friends the sheepherders, who in that instant outleaped the philosophers. That was the night I entered into the family and fellowship of Christ—made my assent, such as it was—one more poor wretch, who had nothing to bring but his iniquities.

* * *

And all this while the Cathedral had been steadily filling, and I was vaguely aware of it, though too absorbed in my own thoughts to be conscious of time. But suddenly there began behind me the sound of the rising of people, a sound coming up out of the hush that held it, and filling the hush, gathering in waves from here and there, as section after section, in the gathering awareness, rose to the feet. Even in the days of my greatest resistance, this had been one of the most compelling things I had experienced in the Catholic churches: a kind of inner spontaneous coming-up, as a flock of birds of the fields, out of some inner instinctual thing, rises: the commonness of it, the mutual identity of the need, and this, the response to the need. Just before the Canon you hear it. In the better-mannered parishes they wait discreetly for the bell, but in the poorer parishes they do not wait. When the Preface is on and they know the Sanctus is drawing near, they begin to go forward from their seats to the kneeling; you hear the spread of the sound of them moving ahead to kneel. I received it now as the great hushed and expectant congregation rose to its feet, and looking up I saw that the acolytes were coming in, the subdeacon and the deacon, and behind them, in his great vestments, the Archbishop himself. But now he was no longer the Archbishop. He was any priest before any altar in the whole of Christendom, bending into the Confiteor. And the Mass began.

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A ROBINSON JEFFERS MEMORIAL

Photography by: EDWARD WESTON and BRETT WESTON

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"HERE ALL'S DOWN HILL and passively goes to the grave,
Asks only a pinch of pleasure between the darknesses,
Contented to think that everything has been done
That's in the scope of the race: so should I also perhaps
Dream, under the empty angel of this twilight,
But the great memory of that unhumanized world,
With all its wave of good and evil to climb yet,
Its exorbitant power to match, its heartless passion to equal,
And all its music to make, beats on the grave-mound."

"FOR MAN will be blotted out, the blithe earth die, the brave sun
Die blind and blacken to the heart:
Yet stones have stood for a thousand years, and pained thoughts found
The honey of peace in old poems."

"THOUGH ONE at the end of the age and far off from this place
Should meet my presence in a poem,
The ghost would not care but be here, long sunset shadow in the
seams of the granite, and forgotten
The flesh, a spirit for the stone."

The text for this photographic memorial section is composed of excerpts from the poems of Robinson Jeffers (1887-1962) found in The Selected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers *(Random House, 1938). Acknowledgments are made to Random House, Inc., the publishers of Robinson Jeffers, and to the Estate of Robinson Jeffers.*

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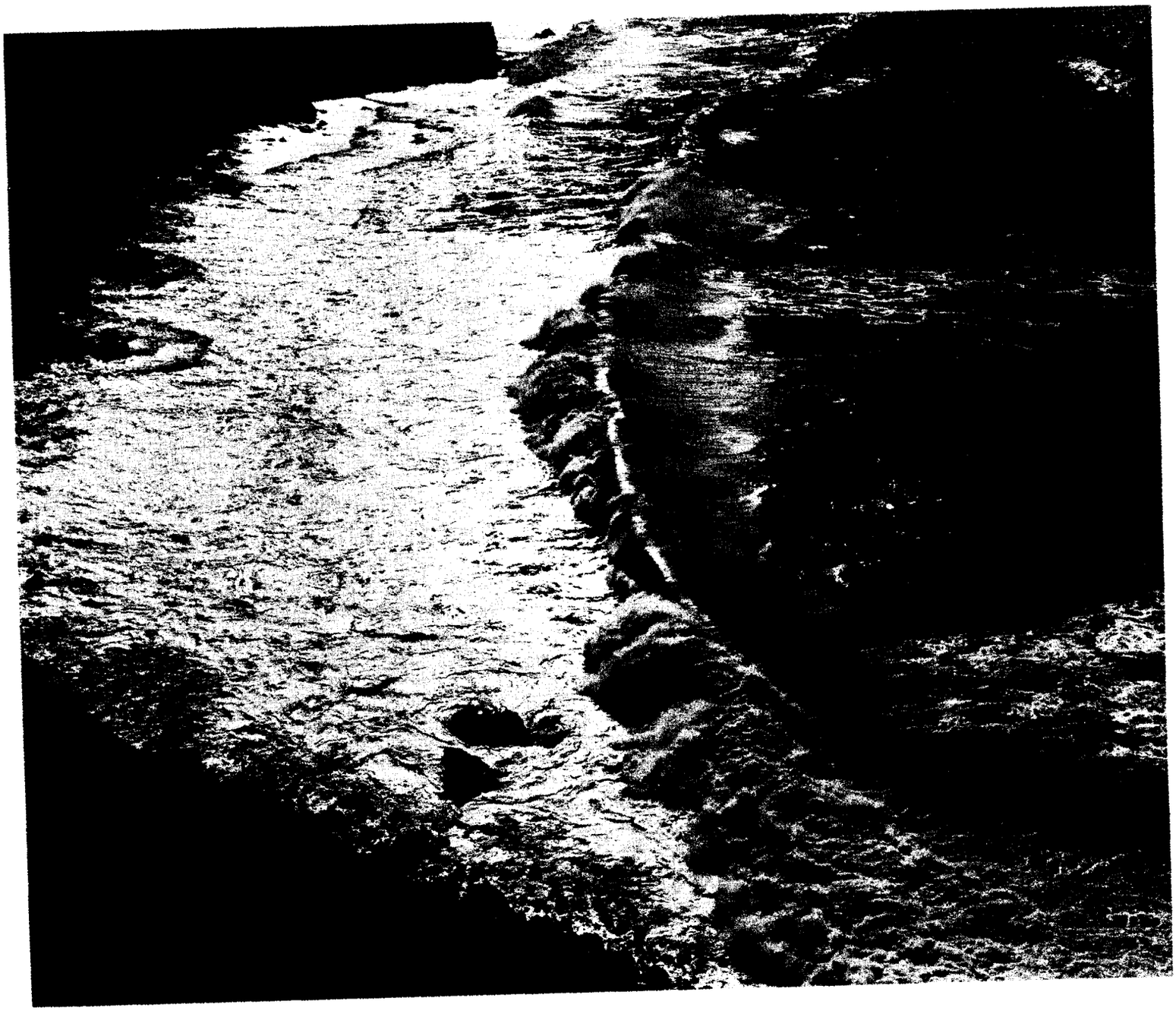

"O PASSIONATELY at peace when will that tide draw shoreward?
Truly the spouting fountains of light, Antares, Arcturus,
Tire of their flow, they sing one song but they think silence. . . .
And I and my people, we are willing to love the four-score years
Heartily; but as a sailor loves the sea, when the helm is for harbor."

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"What fell was relaxed,
Owl-downy, soft feminine feathers; but what
Soared: the fierce rush: the night-herons by the flooded river
cried fear at its rising
Before it was quite unsheathed from reality."

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"UNMEASURED POWER, incredible passion, enormous craft: no
thought apparent but burns darkly
Smothered with its smoke in the human brain-vault: no thought
outside: a certain measure in phenomena:
The fountains of the boiling stars, the flowers on the foreland,
the ever-returning roses of dawn."

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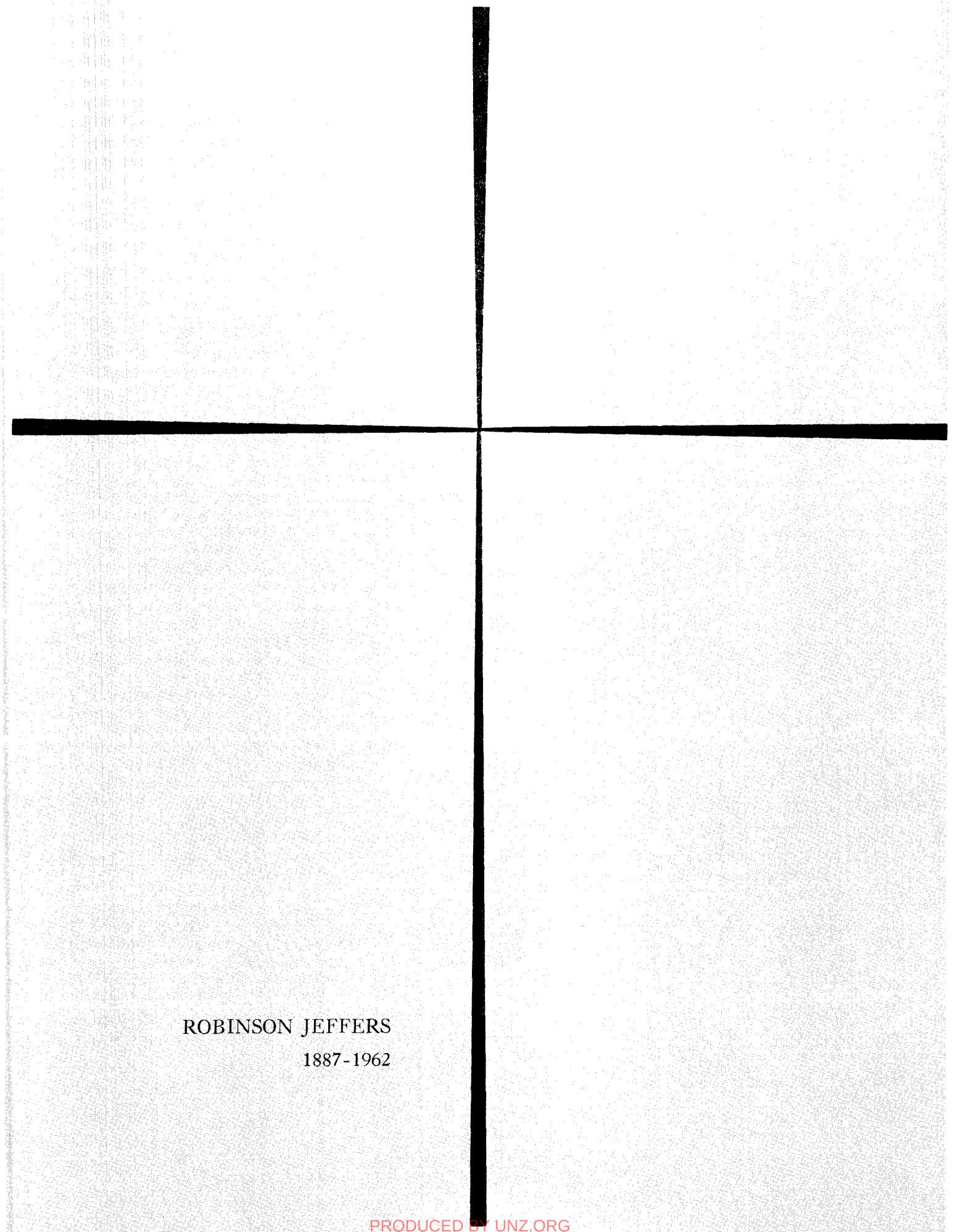

ROBINSON JEFFERS

1887-1962

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STONE IN THE RIVER

By
Harry Stiehl

This is the continuation and the conclusion of a novella of a boy, Lawrence Braun, growing up in the West Indies. The introductory section of the novella appeared in the May issue of Ramparts.

III

MARACAIBO LAY, THAT MORNING, beyond the portholes of the oil tanker. Surfeited with fig newtons that the Chinese steward had brought with the morning tea, the boy stared out, his breath misting the circled glass, to the jade-pavilion mirror of the sea and the city, *eloigné*, unreal, beyond. This was the first time that he had ever come alone from Aruba to visit his grandparents, but the family knew that the kindly Captain Bumblebee would look after the boy and see that he got into the proper launch, should the grandfather not be able to meet him.

His grandfather did not come. Waving goodbye to Captain Bumblebee, he saw the rusty British tanker diminishing in the wake of the launch. The pilot of the launch was a young Venezuelan who knew his grandfather, and with this youth, whose effortless guiding of the wheel dazzled Lawrence, he chatted in "crypto-Berlitz" Spanish.

They whirled past the sea terminal, barges, and an old scow, to the wharves. Coffee and green bananas were being loaded there. After he had cleared with the aduanero and a second medical officer, the boy could go ashore: through the bodega and a wooden turnstile to a vast echoing terminal where his grandmother with her friend Mrs. Gussop awaited him. His grandmother wore lime-coloured linen which clashed arrestingly with her hennaed hair. With a cry, she clasped him to her, asking questions one after another, quickly, like a firecracker string, without waiting for an answer to any of them. She waved her hands as she talked (it was her "French blood"), and her rings flashed in a shaft of sunlight. Mrs. Gussop was much more restrained: she gave him, briefly, her dour Ulster smile. They all walked out into the sun and the heat of Maracaibo and were immediately beset with shoeshine boys, boys selling tarjetas postales of Venezuelan scenes, boys crying out for taxis. His grandmother distributed some coins and the trio got into a taxi, a dilapidated De Soto decorated with a foxtail, a kewpie doll, and an oleograph of the Blessed Virgin.

SUCH A LOVELY CITY! Avenidas of flamboyant and acacia, cubist villas of stucco in Easter egg colours with bougainvillea writhing over the walls, spoke-wheel statued circles that his grandmother said were like her native New Orleans (but which Lawrence was to see better exemplified later in the District of Columbia), and, everywhere, little plazas with their statue of Bolivar like a secular saint. The streets were dreadfully narrow and there were no traffic lights, but the taxi wove between the sidewalk tiendas and the pedestrians, and, as it approached a corner, the driver honked wildly, pressed down on the accelerator and began an audible *Dios Te salve, Maria* . . . The prayer seemed to work, for they did not have any side-on collisions with cars rushing wildly out, like cockroaches, from the cross-streets. Because the grandmother wanted to get some curtain-material and gumdrops at a botica,

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they came to her house by so circuitous a route that the boy was to think, for years afterwards, that they had crossed the largest city in the world.

They dropped Mrs. Gussop off at her house, just down the street from the grandmother's rented villa. Amarilla-coloured, with azulejos and majolica insets in the Moorish façade, the grand villa had a patio with a tiled fountain and cold marble floors that, with their non-resilience and chill, were to make his feet quickly ache. The criada had prepared the comida and they were able to sit down to it when, a few minutes later, the grandfather arrived from his office. Tall and lean, with a diamond stickpin that flashed and flashed from his handpainted tie, he smelled of the cigars that he incessantly smoked. The boy jumped into his arms, like an agile puppy, and was whirled through the air while the grandmother laughed delightedly and told the grandfather, in embellished detail, all the news of their daughter that the boy had been able to edge in during the taxi-ride.

After the comida, the grandfather lay down in his room for his siesta. The grandmother and the boy took siestas too. The mosquito-nets were lowered, the blinds were shuttered, and the fans were switched on. It was as cool, then, as a cave. The boy, dreaming of Ali Baba, woke to the cool green evening and the open blinds where, beyond the flamboyant tree, stars and a planet clustered. He freshened his face and went downstairs where his grandfather was reading the *Wall Street Journal:* the Standard Oil stock was standing firm. They all sat down to consommé, avocados, and beefsteaks. Then, while the criada was clearing away the dishes, his grandmother changed into her gold lace for the película. They were all three rabid movie fans and, even in the dim Maracaibo theatres, enjoyed the American movies with their sub-titles in Spanish. The film tonight was ages old, *Grand Hotel*, with Greta Garbo and his grandmother's second favourite, John Barrymore. Her first favourite was Menjou.

Greta Garbo with her rich deep voice and her luminous eyes was, to the boy, a revelation, and he fell wildly in love with her, imitating, for years afterward, her grenadier stride and her melancholy intensity. John Barrymore was a disappointment to his grandmother, and she intimated that his star was definitely fading. She had heard such tales of his drinking from dear Mrs. Gussop, whose daughter was a Hollywood stand-in, and in her opinion no alcoholic could be a great artist.

The grandfather drove them over the night-bright city in his Lincoln Zephyr. Over fêted façades, fireworks rose and fell. A Ferris wheel, luminous with light, whirled with a cargo of hysterical señoritas. The American Navy was visiting the city and the gobs were out everywhere. The grandmother said that she could remember when no decent girl would be *seen* with a sailor, and the grandfather said that it *still* applied and that he could remember a case in New Orleans. . . . What this had been Lawrence never learned, for the grandmother mysteriously said that little pitchers had big ears and it was nearly midnight. So the grandfather bought some ice cream and, back home, they had it in big bowls laced with crème de cacao which the grandmother admitted *was* alcoholic but which was the only chocolate syrup in the house. The boy said that it was the best chocolate syrup he had ever tasted and wanted some more, but she said, You have had quite enough, young man, and it is long past your bedtime. He kissed his grandfather goodnight and went upstairs to his room to get into the pajamas that were out on the bed for him. Then, in his bed, he kissed his grandmother goodnight and she switched off the ceiling light. When she had gone downstairs, Lawrence got out of bed and went to the window.

The blinds were open. Stars swarmed in the heavens like golden bees, and a pale planet glowed. Over the night city revolved the luminous Ferris wheel. The whole day had been simply perfect and he resolved to remember it like this forever. It was wonderful to think that he had a whole summer before he had to return to Aruba and the next year of school. He leaned out farther, smelling the cape jasmine in the patio. The flamboyant, gilded with light, was dropping its orange flowers. He saw, suddenly, in the street lamp's circled light a Venezuelan pissing in the gutter while cockroaches, routed, thrashed in the foaming

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urine. With a revolted, Anglo-Saxon cry at this "obscenity," he quickly shut the blinds and fell back into bed.

THE NEXT DAY, which was a Sunday, they all went to a late Mass, the first that his grandparents had been to in longer than they could remember, for they were lapsed Catholics like their daughter. They wished, afterwards, that they had not taken the boy at all, for he did not know when to genuflect and disgraced them thoroughly. Nor did he know the prayers after Low Mass, in either English or Spanish, so the grandmother undertook to teach him the Ave Maria in the French that she had learned as a child in New Orleans. *Je Vous salue, Marie, pleine de grace,* he said, over and over, until he had finally learned the prayer and his grandparents were both so pleased that they bought him a ride-'em-cowboy outfit in the botica. It had been, he reflected, well worth the effort.

The whole summer was like that: outings and presents and strange things to do. Once, he even accompanied his grandfather into the monte when he had to visit one of the camps on the southern end of the lago, and in the jungle he collected an armful of wild orchids which he planned to take back to Aruba. His grandmother had already assembled a whole jungle of plants to enrich her daughter's garden, for Aruba was a coral island and not luxuriantly vegetated. His grandfather declared that she was loading the little fellow down with all that junk, so he arranged that it be packed in the hold of the tanker in the afternoon before the tanker sailed.

THE TANKER DID NOT SAIL until midnight. They accompanied Lawrence down to the wharf where the launch was waiting and kissed him and the grandmother cried a little and pressed into his hands a potted bleeding-heart with thorns and red tear-shaped, tear-size flowers that she said were the tears of Our Lord on the Cross. Lawrence sat on the cushions of the launch, clutching the bleeding-heart, staring sleepily at the midnight wake of the water and the garish cloud-circled city diminishing into dwindled light. A sailor helped him up the rope ship's-ladder and Captain Bumblebee reached his hand to the boy at the top.

In his cabin, Lawrence got into the pajamas which the Chinese steward unpacked from his suitcase. Then, he had a cup of tea with fig-newtons. The bleeding-heart stood on the night table. Lights out, and he heard the ship's bells going on the bridge. He sat on the bunk and stared through the porthole at the segment of the city beyond the midnight sea terminal: a melon-slice of a view, winking with wicked light. It had been so perfect a summer and now he had only to look forward to a night of nausea (for he was a terrible sailor) and another dull year at school with children who only wanted to play hopscotch or jacks and who had never heard of Edgar Allan Poe. An excess of irresistible tristesse welled up in him, the summer's whole burden of unshed tears, and he cried now, unashamedly, over the beauty of the night and of the summer and of Maracaibo, the midnight city, the tears rolling down his cheeks like warm wax from the church candles, as he stared across at his grandmother's potted plant, at the bleeding-heart, with the thorns and red tear-shaped, tear-size flowers that had been the tears of Our Lord on the Cross.

IV

LAWRENCE WAS "ALWAYS READING and reading" until his mother declared that his eyes were going to fall out of his head. He read the Standard Authors, his father's westerns, his mother's murder mysteries, and anthologies of English Verse. His father's favourites were *Thanatopsis* and Gray's *Elegy*, but his mother loved Edgar Allan Poe who had been "our greatest man of letters, though a drunkard." Poe had been "a true Southerner and a gentleman," and the mother and father both hoped that, if the boy persisted with his current notion of being a "writer" when he grew up, he would emulate those finer qualities of Poe.

He loved all the shimmery-shivery tales of Poe, with their *frisson nouveau*, as he loved the more theatrical moments in Shakespeare, the illustrated lamp-lit scenes, the ghost-on-the-battlements and the *Is this a dagger which I see before me?* of Macbeth. The Plays themselves he found often

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dreadfully difficult; he blessed the Lambs' *Tales* for its aid in unravelling the plots. A book he read over and over was *Moby Dick* following a visit to a Norwegian whaling-ship that stopped at the island. A member of the crew gave him a whale's-tooth in oil which he kept afterwards beside his jar of the foot-long centipede in formaldehyde. The ship's captain came to dinner to the boy's house, and his father and the captain conversed in German.

In Mexico, he had been raised by criadas, just as, in New Orleans, his mother and grandmother had been cared for by Negro mammies, and from the criadas and from the mother's and grandmother's memories, Lawrence put together an extraordinary quiltwork of superstitious tales, of black magic, and island voodoo. Many coloured girls came, from Trinidad and Barbados and Martinique and Guadeloupe, to work as servants in the American colony. The stories they could tell! Drawling, using the broad *a* or the uvular *r*, speaking in cultivated tones, they would spin gleaming little webs of taboos and obeahs and voodoo revenges, tales of such black abyssal savagery, that the boy would wake at night from them, screaming, as he did after the vampire films that he could never resist going to. When he remembered them, in later years, they seemed to him a terrible counterpoint to the savagery rampant in the civilized world, abroad, in the news that came over the radio about Manchuria and Barcelona and Addis Ababa. Had not the Berlin maniac said there were no islands any more? But Lawrence felt that there were still islands, as terrible almost as the menaced cities.

For the islands, for him, lifted, floated in Indian baths . . . Baths of blood. There was, for instance . . .

There was a black girl who stole another girl's husband. His heart flopped in her hand like a fish that you reach up from the swift-running stream or spear in the shallows among the seaweed. He was crazy for her and left his wife and their babies and followed the girl to the next village and lived with her. The moon rose over the royal palms fringing the waterfall pool and there they made love, moaning and reaching out to one another in their terrible ecstasy, his hands going through her hair, her arms circling his glistening back like twisting snakes. The abandoned wife, after she had poured ashes over her hair and grieved in a three-day drunken stupor, went to the obeah and got a voodoo fix. With the money from the straw baskets she had sold to tourist ladies, she bought a likeness of the husband-stealing girl. She studded it with pins; she wound one of the girl's hair-ribbons round the doll; she wrung a chicken's-neck over it, and let the wax-warm drops of blood fall. For seven days she did this, and on the morning of the eighth day the girl was found with her neck broken and blood on her like a chicken. And the husband prudently returned and lived with his wife.

The boy remembered this tale when he went to Haiti and stood among the ruins of Sans Souci and saw the little ovens where Henri Christophe had cremated his enemies alive. Up higher, in the mountains, the guide said, there was the Citadel where one day Christophe had marched a platoon of his soldiers over the cliff to their deaths to test their obedience. The boy said that would be exciting to see, but the mother declared that she had had enough of ruins and death for one day, so they went back in the hired Pierce-Arrow touring-car into Port-au-Prince and took the launch back to their ship.

V

The actual trips to the islands—repeated summer after summer, except for occasional vacations in Venezuela—were almost less exciting to Lawrence than the reminiscences he heard of them from Rose. On Saturday afternoons, after finishing his paper-route, he padded up to the ridiculous "Ann Hathaway chateau" which, as wife to "The" Captain of the Company's merchant fleet, she was permitted to occupy.

Rose was a "sea-widow." In her cupolaed cubby-hole above her husband's "wheelhouse" terrace, she sat, day in, night out, her spy-glass turned on the sea. It winked, a plate-glass blue ("Have you been to Cartier's, child? Tiffany's? When I look on those glittering acres out there, I feel that I too own diamonds.") for miles around,

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and on it, the sea's mirror, she kept tab on the ships. (Her husband was in port about every three weeks and stayed for forty-eight hours or less, if he could manage it.) Rose was dim, dithering, vaguely sixty-ish, a tweedy Jamaica-born ex-Fabian given now to reactionary back-slidings in the spirit world, as she presided over her musical glasses, ouija-boards, ectoplasm cabinets and her sub-deb recollections of Madame Blavatsky. She was an apple-dumpling on the Tree of Life, dreaming of her salad days,—and to say as she was then was all her occupation now.

How she did talk of her *jeunesse* in Jamaica! And in Lawrence—intrigued at first and now ensnared by her compulsive gifts of Huntley and Palmer tins of biscuits, of tributary bowls of glazed ginger for Larry's mother, of finger-tip flamenco rarities for his orchid collection—she had a wholly captive audience.

Rose was named not for her hair—a thinning hennaed halo—or the Della Robbia complexion she must have had as a baby, but for the Jamaica plantation that had been in her family from the early *dix-huitième* down to the Boer War. It was owned now by "the Abyssinian branch of the Rothschilds," by "some Back Bay *Gauleiter* of the Almanach de Golgotha" who was "gaudily ensconced in Rome" clipping *her* sugar-shares, living off the dividends that Rose's seven maiden aunts in Glasgow had worried themselves into a pauper's-grave trying to retrieve in a succession of Dickensian law-suits.

SHE TALKED IN THE VOCATIVE-ECSTATIC idiom reserved for the summer novels of Decayed Gentlewomen; she could almost be scanned at times into anapaests and iambs, so emphatic was her late Victorian lilt.

"O the Rose Plantation, as it was in the days of Monk Lewis and Beckford! (Such a man of taste and culture, Great Grandmamá Gordon knew him well, though a dabbler in diabolism.) There were *four* ballrooms, the carriage-house could hold a company of Coldstream Guards, there was a Great Wall of Jamaica looping the rolled-lawn acreage sloping down from the House and screening from view the sugar-mills and distilleries and the Bamboo Ghetto of the 'sooties.' The Gordons always treated their blacks fairly—fairly but *firmly*: there was none of this humanistic nonsense. We gave them free medical aid and free burials. Do the Soviets do more? And you will see, my child, what with the Purges (which you don't need to *know* about) and the Hitler Pact, the crypto-Marxists will be deserting that ship. Then will men ask, mark my words, *Ou sont les marxistes d'antan?* Is your French up to that? Pass me your cup. I do say that there's nothing like Darjeeling with this condensed milk."

His grandmother had been teaching Lawrence French, but the only thing he had learned was "the *Ave Maria* in Canuck."

"That's not very useful for *travelling*. I can remember——" And then she was off on her travels. He suspected that most of these were invented, too, but she was so much better as Lady Hester Stanhope than as Little Eva, that anyone hearing her would have cried to Rose, *Odysseus, Speak!*

VI

A WEEKLY NEWSPAPER of colony events was published in the camp, and the boy was one of three who, on Saturdays, delivered it to subscribers and sold it at the Gate into the Oil refinery and into Sint Nikolaas. He took the job that he might have spending money, but he ended up by avariciously banking it all. The job was rather demanding for a little boy of eleven, small for his age and herringbone-thin. On Saturdays he rose at four and ate breakfast under his mother's anxious gaze, then bicycled down in the dark to the Gate of the refinery to sell papers to the men coming off the night shift and the men going on to the day shift. The Gate was guarded by Dutch soldiers with whom he loved to talk, for they were handsome and manly in their uniforms and so free in their speech to one another, so salacious in detail, over their sex lives. In Oranjestadt and Sint Nikolaas, there were few young girls of good family that they could court (these girls were usually educated in Holland), but there were many native women who welcomed them, as they said, "with open legs."

After it became light and the last men had gone through the Gate onto the morning shift, the boy

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left the Gate to deliver the paper to subscribers in the camp. His route was a circuitous one, covering half the camp, and as he bicycled or trudged along it, he became familiar with many smiling mothers and many terrifying dogs. There were some women with whom he could speak of his orchid collection or of Poe, but there were more who sat in their kimonos, hair askew, with terrible hangovers. The boredom of their lives, the unchanging weather, the nostalgia for the States, their overwhelming feeling that they were abandoned and forgotten by the rest of the civilized world, the world that spoke English and spent dollars,—all this drove women to drink, as it drove their husbands or the bachelor engineers of the company. They sat at the Club, drinking heavily and flirting lightly, Ennui circled into their very entrails. No-one this side of a camisole was fired for alcoholism: such a policy would have emptied the executive echelons. New York understood that this was all part of colonial living, and tried not to frown too much. And if it did? New York was "half a world away."

And so it was that, as he went on his paper route, Lawrence passed bungalow after bungalow whose garbage cans bulged with such terrible symbols of waste and want as empty whiskey bottles and spent condoms (whose use he had heard boldly defined by older boys in their smoke-room smutty stories). In the tension and anxiety of that decade, with a Depression in the States and a Storm gathering in Europe, many women did not want to bring children into the world. Those who became pregnant often went to the States for their ordeal, although a fine hospital existed in the camp, staffed by expensive surgeons and a whole corps of nurses. These nurses, like the school-teachers, were always being lost to the various bachelor engineers who lived in great bunkhouses or barracks near the refinery. It was to these bachelor quarters that, after his subscriptions were delivered, the boy came to sell the papers that still remained.

These men lived, it seemed, in single rooms or several to a room. They were always friendly to the boy and bought his papers and joked with him, though they, too, often had terrible hangovers and sat around, those Saturday early afternoons, in a general state of undress. Some of them pattered dripping naked from the shower to buy his papers when he scratched on the screen and called out the name of the newspaper; others, from a litter of beer bottles in a darkened room, told him to go-away-for-God's-sake or told him to come in, plunk down his paper, and find money for it in the pocket of their pants hung over a chair or cast onto the floor. It was sometimes hot enough so that they slept in just their shorts or in nothing at all, the sheets twisted across, or flung from, their drugged sleep like the cerements of a shroud. They all lived in a bonhommous camaraderie. Some gave him stamps for his collection. Many inquired after his mother and father, his uncles and aunts, his grandmother and grandfather and cousins (for the family had spread in a sinister nepotism over the Lago colonies). He admired them all, with indiscriminate naïveté, with their talk of big-league baseball and small-time whores. Theirs was, assuredly, the charmed life.

But one day Lawrence was privileged a glimpse into the abysses of human loneliness and the victims who despairingly trampled under immemorial tribal taboos. It was, he would understand years later, the other side of the incestuous coin. For one afternoon, tired from the long stretch since four A.M., he scratched on a screen and called out, receiving for answer ambiguous sounds which he took for *Come in!* in Basic Alcoholic, so he entered the shade-shuttered room.

There were two men in the bed, in their agonized ecstasy completely oblivious to him, and when he saw what they were doing, he was so astounded that he dropped the canvas bag that he used for carrying the papers and knocked over some glasses and an alarm clock. Then, thoroughly frightened, he tried to leave the darkened room, but his foot tangled with a light-cord and pulled over a floor lamp with a loud crash. He sprawled with it headlong over the floor by the bed.

The men had, by this time, become aware of his presence and, extricating themselves, had come over to pick him up from the mess he had made of broken glass. Because they were even more frightened than he, they were angry with him

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and rough, but when they saw that he was cut from the glass and crying to beat the band, they tried to soothe him and one of them pattered into the bathroom for some iodine. They covered their nudity, then, with bathrobes and sat with him on the bed a long time, talking to him. They asked him to forget what he had seen and not breathe it to a living soul, and they offered him a hundred guilders (to Lawrence, a small fortune, for he earned about four guilders a week) but he could not accept the money. They were suspicious, then, that he would tell and stood over him with menacing power, while he assured them, over and over, that he would not tell anyone, not even his mother, and they both cried, *No, God, not your mother!*, for they both knew her well.

After a while, they seemed to believe the boy and smiled more and one of them said, *Gee whiz, what a close shave!* and told the boy how he was too young to understand how terrible it was to be stranded on this island without a decent white woman and how a fellow had to let himself go once in a while. The other man said, sharply, *Shut up, Jack*, and they bickered together for a while and then were all smiles again. They bought the rest of Lawrence's papers (there were seven) and picked up his canvas bag and the boy said, again, how sorry he was about the mess he had caused on the floor. The men said, *Forget it, bucko*, and scooped the glass into a wastebasket and when he said goodbye to them, one of the men said, again, please be a sport because he could really mess up their lives and their careers if he told, and the other man said, *Hell, don't tell him that*, and then they were bickering again. So the boy crossed-his-heart-and-hoped-to-die and they let him go.

He went out the door and down the long wooden balcony screened against flies and downstairs into the sun. He was dog-tired after his eleven hours of tramping about. Along the Company road, as he trudged home, his uncle picked him up in his Dodge and said, *What's new?*, and the boy answered, thinking of the men in the shade-shuttered room, thinking of the desert of the bed and of the steric holocaust of lust, Nothing's new.

THOUGH HE NEVER TOLD, he never forgot either nor forgave. He never went back to that particular room to sell his papers, but he saw both the men, again, at dances at the Club and they evaded his eyes or looked back at him, boldly, their arms circled around other men's drunk wives, daring him to tell, daring him to make a mess of their careers, and moved their hands down intimately into the small of the women's backs while the women giggled and screeched, Naughty-naughty, not in public, and their husbands at the bar cried, What the hell!, and started to cut in, but went back to their highballs.

And then it happened that he did forget and the memory, the picture, dimmed in his mind, faded and went out in the darkness creeping upon the world, upon this island, the Netherlands invaded by Panzer divisions, Rotterdam obliterated, and a whole gala world of fêted luxury dropped away. For a dozen years the memory lay forgotten, until, when he was walking one night in a winter capital, with the fatal news from Korea thick in the air, the Chinese Reds pouring southward in hordes upon the retreating husk of an army, upon a General's blundering butchery, the whole scene flashed vividly again upon his mind's eye. The fountain in Dupont Circle was frozen in the frore glitter where traffic circled ceaselessly from spokewheel embassy-lined avenues, coming and going at compass-directions in that Christmas season fever, and the homosexuals walked their circuit in an errant precision of despair. He saw a casual pick-up achieved, heard the sailor's, *Hell, why not?*, and saw the two men drive off to some apartment of the winter city. The weight of a decade fell off, the years slid back to a shade-shuttered room and the sheet-twisted lineaments of a bed, shrouded, where the men moaned to one another in the desperate agony of their hard desire, and he saw them, future skeletons, caught like flies in amber, and cried out, across his mind's marginal spectres, for them and for all men menaced in the misery of a world without God, *Domine non sum dignus ut intres sub tectum meum sed tantum dic verbo et sanabitur anima mea*, Lord I am not worthy that Thou shouldst enter under my roof, but speak the word only and my soul shall be healed.

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VII

ACACIA FRINGED AND CIRCLED the garden, and yearlong its blossom fell as yearlong its branches grew, for the seasons of the island were only alternating periods of wet and dry weather. The yellow-white flowers which, decaying, were tiny skulls, littered the stone walks of the garden which wound under trellises, bougainvillea-banked, here and there, to the flamboyant, to the lily-pond, to the pigeon-house, the pheasant-run. The glossy pods of the flamboyant with their agate-hard seeds dropped yearlong too like the orange flowers. And the acacias dropped their papery seeds, which, speedily germinating, were always thrusting up virid spears into light. All the trees, bee-heavy, hummed with a drugged perpetual music as the pollen drifted. The air shone fine and clear, an immemorial summer, and the sea, beyond, was a "wink of eternity."

Here the boy played with the silky daschund under the trellises and listened to his mother talk. Sometimes, they had tea together in mid-morning or mid-afternoon, a l'anglaise or with lemon, eating Swedish cakes and drinking from the stilled porcelain, against which the silver spoons rang bell clear. The teapot, with its cozy, looked like a sulky Persian or like an English poet of the dix-huitième, an oval portrait of Pope or Collins or Cowper or Gray, whose silkily-elegant styles the boy adored.

His mother would speak of the Mexico where the boy had been born during the Calles era and the persecution of the Catholic Church. His mother had been so fearful that her children would be *analphabetistas*, that she had taught them herself under the Calvert System. By the age of five, the boy could read well, and thereafter books claimed him as much as his beloved swimming. In the salt buoyant water of the Caribbean and the Golfo de Mexico, he splashed like a seal.

The words of her tales wove, imperceptibly, round him, seemed a part of him, like the beat of blood. She had been married in Tampico to a tall Texan, a charming rogue of the hard-drinking hell-bent breed. There were still in existence photographs of this period, sepia as tea, in which she stared from a cloche hat with the haunted eyes of a film siren.

AND, TRULY, SHE WAS HAUNTED, seemed to be always listening for the whirring of wings, the stirrings of ghosts, the batlike cackle of the Eumenides. As she spoke, delicious shivers of dread coursed the boy's spine, a shudder of longing satisfaction, so that his very blood seemed to run back and back, splattering from Aztec sacrificial stone. She spoke of Tampico, more American than Mexican, with its oil-clogged Panuco, its sea-terminal to the Gulf, its cantinas flaring with garish light. At night there, as on this island, the sun dropped rapidly, bringing blackness, with no twilight intervals such as, in more northerly latitudes, is the time for melancholy reflections and the flood of long regret. It was an oil town, almost a Texas oil town, mushrooming with quick money and quicker death. The Madero Revolution was still within recent memory, nor was the government, even under the merciless Calles, yet thoroughly stable.

In the monte, in the hills, there was hunting on the great haciendas, those which were not yet partitioned and their owners dispossessed. The mother and father were often invited to these hunts. The boy, as a baby, had been borne to the haciendas, had been left with the Spanish aunts and the Indian criadas while the mother hunted. She shot well, bringing back wild turkey, grouse, quail, their sleek feathers blood-encrusted. There would then be a great feast at the hacienda, with more courses than she could count or eat. Certain families had their private priest, but the Church had gone underground and the Mass could not be openly celebrated. It was for this reason that she had been married in a civil ceremony, in a winter month, and they had come out of the consulate into the intense Tampico heat. A few rice grains were flung at the taxi by her husband's bachelor friends, and then the newlyweds drove off to the Hotel Imperial and a suite overlooking the plaza.

WHEN THE SISTER WAS BORN, the mother had made an arduous train-journey to the border, to Laredo, Texas, that her child might be born in the States. It was a three-day ordeal, in

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the September heat, as she sat in the day-coach with her mother, surrounded by Indians with baskets of pigeons and fruit and leashed pigs. Every few miles the train stopped, and more Indians ran out selling pulque and soft-drinks and cactus candy. In Laredo, she had lingered a month, while the nuns fussed over her. The heat was intense, a white dry heat. She had been melancholy and hysterical, but after the baby was born, she calmed. The nuns, because she forgot to instruct them not to, quickly bore off her baby girl and baptized her into the Roman Catholic fold. When, several years later, she was pregnant with the boy, the mother had refused to make that trip again and the boy was born in Tampico.

But he could not remember Tampico and knew it only through his mother's memories and tales. When he went to Maracaibo, his grandmother talked to him also of Tampico, though she preferred to talk of New Orleans, of coffee in the French Quarter, of the fine restaurants and the houses with their iron-spider balconies; of the cemeteries where her aunts lay, dry in the vaults, above the swampy ground; of the boating on Lake Ponchartrain, the oyster sandwiches and mountains of pink shelled shrimp. She, like her daughter, preferred New Orleans to all other cities and intended to retire there, with the grandfather when their years in Venezuela were up. The grandfather had spent his entire life in the tropics, having started as a telegraph operator with the American Railroad at Empalme, Sonora. Years later, when Lawrence, then a young man, drove through Empalme on a trip down the coast from Arizona to Mazatlan, he had asked about the old American colony. The railroad was not state-owned, but the bungalows of the Americans were still, after fifty years, the only fine houses of the town.

He had stood under spreading shade-trees, the first he had seen since the orchards south of Nogales, and had looked across at the rocky hills that ringed Guaymas and imprisoned that old harbour-town in blistering heat, and remembered when, almost twenty years before, on a Maracaibo terrace, he had first heard of this part of Mexico. After the Revolution those arid acres had gone into long decline until the irrigation-dams brought a boom to the west coast, leaving to Mexico only Yucatan and Baja as undeveloped frontiers. It was in that year (1955) that Tampico, during a great hurricane, almost returned to the sea; the water rose in the streets over the Hotel Imperial and American helicopters landed on rooftops to rescue the dispossessed.

ALL THE THINGS HE HEARD OF MEXICO WOVE themselves into a sort of serape-pattern: multicoloured, garish. But his earliest memory of Mexico was one which could have belonged nearly anywhere: the vision and the oppressive perfume of gold, furred bees plunging relentlessly into pollen-stained roses, the resonance of the bees intensifying in the siesta heated air, and his mother, walking with happy irresolution, in a huge sun-hat through her Tampico garden. Again, it flashed before him, as he smiled at his mother, lifting the porcelain teacup, under the trellises where the daschund snoozed, and the ripe acacia flowers, tiny skulls, in a fine rain fell.

VIII

ONE TERRIBLE YEAR THERE WAS a revolution in Venezuela. The mother on Aruba for days had no news of her parents. Hysterical commentary came over the short-wave from New York.

When order had been restored, by a bloody purge of rebels, and a new dictator had dedicated himself, under the guise of reform, to the old corrupted policies of the fallen dictator, the mother was able to fly to Caracas, where her parents were currently living, via the newly instituted KLM system. She found them shaken, but whole, and spent several weeks with them before returning to Aruba. Then, the following summer, the boy went to visit his grandparents in Caracas. He and his sister went in a banana boat to La Guaira, then by taxi twenty miles inland to the plateau capital. Behind, from the back window of the Chrysler taxi, he had looked at the diminishing panoply of La Guaira and its penal colony, where men shovelled sand all one day to one part of a quadrangle that they might shovel it back on the following day, back and forth, on and on, in a repeated

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nightmare action under the bored murderous eyes of the guards, as in some sunken circle of Dante's *Inferno*. Under the pitiless sun, the men soon turned to gibbering idiots. The more fortunate were released, either by exposure or by a guard's itchy trigger-finger, to the relative dignity of death.

The grandfather had arranged with a friend of his, an official of the Venezuelan government, that the boy and the sister might visit the prison, but they recoiled in horror from the gray, echoing, mortuary halls and the blazing quadrangle of torture. While they were there, a man fainted and was dragged off by a guard, his head bumping on the stone floor of the quadrangle. The boy remembered a sight he had once seen in a Maracaibo market: a man twisting in epileptic seizure before the stalls of mangoes and avocados while other Venezuelans stood around him in a circle, laughing, poking him with sticks. The boy and the sister were overcome with nausea and told their grandfather's friend, whom they now loathed for his share in this amoral, indifferent atrocity, that they wished to leave. He put them into the taxi bound for Caracas, directed the driver regarding their grandparents' address in the capital, and waved to them as they were driving off. They refused to wave back. The sister said that it had all been "simply revolting," and the boy agreed, and they got out their flacon of Eau de Cologne and splashed the cooling Lethean liquid on their wrists and temples that they might not faint. Their mother and grandmother had always praised the excellent restorative qualities of Eau de Cologne and would never travel without a flask of it.

When they reached their grandmother's house in Caracas, a Cubist villa stuccoed pink, they were in a state of shock, for the driver had whirled them over the old mountain road at a dizzying pace (he had been paid a set price for the trip) until they had felt that they were going to go off the road. Going off the road was serious: the cliff fell off sheerly almost five thousand feet. They had been above the clouds, had been able to look down into the virid valleys, far below, where vultures patiently sailed. There had been periodic *memento mori*: monuments, like little roadside shrines, of demolished cars whose drivers had gone off that road. The driver had told them all about it, over and over, until they were rigid with terror. Even the Eau de Cologne could do nothing for a situation like that.

In Caracas, they heard again from the grandmother the tale of the revolution atrocities. She had photographs, illegally taken at the risk of incarceration, of scenes in the bodegas where the rebels had been herded in and burned by bayonet-bearing cadets. The bodegas gaped like skull-sockets; blackened, and stacked around like cordwood, were the charred bodies of men and women: the clothes burnt off them and the hair, and their bones poking through the black flesh. The boy had never seen so many naked bodies before. What most astonished him was their absolute sexlessness as they had been cremated in depraved postures. He saw it all as some Hell-scape of hallucinated doom by Hieronymus Bosch, the men and women falling like fragments of lava into chthonic abysses . . . and knew even then what he could learn all over again someday, in the falling, fallen world, and in old books, that oldest maxim of Eden, lost, *Man is wolf to man.*

The boy's world was falling. Never again would come such a year as his last trip to Jamaica: through Kingston in a victoria; in an old Packard up the mountains to the Botanical Gardens where he had been given a stick of camphorwood; across the island, through waterfall-misted valleys, a lacy iridescence, to Montego Bay. Dollfuss was dead, Barcelona obliterated, Munich gone. Suddenly, in the month that his daschund died, the Nazi dive-bombers were terrorizing Warsaw.

When he sold his papers at the Gate, there were always Dutch soldiers guarding the oil concession. One of them was an avowed Nazi and spoke approvingly of Hitler's methods, painting the Utopian day when they would be tried out on a world-wide scale. England and France and the United States were too soft, they needed a Spartan discipline, and he hoped that the Hague would be able to see this. The boy was astonished at this earnest Fascist, who looked, with his blond-haired,

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blue-eyed, sleepy sensualism and determined set jaw, as Larry imagined that Jack Armstrong, the All-American Boy, must look: as if he had strayed from the wheatfields of Kansas into the Kingdom of Oz. He would argue with this soldier, summoning the facile arguments and hysterical rhetoric of his mother's tirades against the Gestapo and Mussolini and the murder of China and Spain (she was so passionately anti-Japanese that, when she had discovered that her favourite tea-set had been "Made in Japan," she had smashed it on the coral beyond her bungalow; she had practically worn out her copy of *Red Star Over China*). A film, controversially banned for a while, was currently agitating the colony: *Blockade*. The boy had heard several bitter voices lifted against the rôle of the Roman Catholic Church in Spain. This was the era when not to be against Franco was to be for Fascism, and every day the rumours grew thicker and the tempers grew uglier.

UNDER THE ALCOHOLIC FOG of official company life, "insidious and sinister events" were preparing. The island, which, during the coming War, would refine enough oil for the daily wartime needs of Great Britain, was honeycombed with German agents. These persons were perfectly respectable and were invited everywhere; some of them came to the boy's house and conversed in German with his father; one, who ran a camera store in Sint Nikolaas was an especial friend of Larry's mother (she owned several Leicas and was always trying out new films and filters). These Germans lived, as a rule, outside the American camp; they had stores and businesses in Sint Nikolaas and in Oranjestadt, the capital. Sometimes the boy went, with his family, to dinners at their houses in the capital, but these were sentimental gatherings, non-political, where German was spoken, Goethe recited, and the Lorelei sung. The boy's mother did not speak German at all, but she tried to be pleasant to her husband's friends: she sat in her cocktail gown and fingered her amber beads, Baltic amber, with embedded bees and the wings of flies, and one frau would say to her, in tourist English, that she must learn German and move with the times.

The times *were* moving. One morning, the boy woke to find that Holland had been invaded during the night, and that the Dutch police, who were not quite so stupid as people had supposed, had rounded up all the Nazi sympathizers and had shipped them to the neighboring island of Bonaire, a bleak unvisited island where, during the months to come, the membership of the concentration camp would grow and grow. Many of his father's friends were among them, but his father was not picked up, for he was an American citizen and, indeed, quite ignorant of the seditious undercurrent of the German group. An unhappier fate was in store for the friend who ran the camera shop, for he tried to evade the Dutch police and was shot down so that he fell flatly across the floor of his shop behind the glittering showcase of Leicas.

THE BOY REMEMBERED THE DUTCH SOLDIER who had praised the Nazis, remembered him the horrifying day when the radio told of Rotterdam systematically obliterated by the Luftwaffe: Holland had been administered its Spartan discipline. He never saw the soldier thereafter at the refinery Gate and often wondered whether he had been found out or had simply been transferred to a war sector. Some months later, Aruba itself was menaced by a German submarine which sank, one after another, with contemptuous ease, five British oil tankers as they left the Company harbour. It was an impressive and terrible event, worse than the newsreels that the boy had seen of the Bombing of the Panay.

He was standing, that day, under the acacias inspecting his orchids, when he heard the first exploding *whoosh* and saw the tanker split apart, spouting flaming oil over the hyaline green Caribbean less than five hundred yards away: The bougainvillea blossoms of the trellis were dropping, dried, like clotted blood. His father's pigeons were circling over the coral ledges by the beach. There was a white hot sun in the sky.

As he stared, unbelieving, a second *whoosh* came, and another and another and another, until the whole horrifying pattern was complete. Oil, the life-blood of Britain, the wealth of Venezuela, the wealth that sustained the boy's family as well,

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spread flaming over the sea's smooth surface in widening circles, and in that blackened, blistering stain could be discerned things thrashing, ant-size, the men who had manned the tankers and who were now dying in irremediable agony before the eyes of hundreds of American residents, for all along the coral cliffs, now, women were running hysterically before the bungalows, frenzied and completely helpless. This island, too, had received its Spartan lesson, and now that it had, even for these Americans who did not have to die, there were, truly, no islands any more.

IX

DURING THE LAST SUMMER that Lawrence spent on the island, France fell. France! His grandmother could not get over it, kept shaking her head, for her grandmother had come from France and had told her, when she was a child, of Paris and the Midi and the fine festival wines. A part of her childhood had been, even in memory, irrecoverably destroyed. A month earlier, Holland had been over-run and the island was now under martial law. Little was heard from the German sympathizers exiled to Bonaire.

There were more parades and ceremonies now in honor of the Queen, but these were grim and gray and so unlike that marvellous night when the guns had boomed from Oranjestadt harbour to announce the birth of the new heiress-apparent to the Netherlands throne. All that night, fireworks had risen and fallen over the harbour. Years before, the Queen had visited Aruba and the boy had marched before her, with other schoolchildren, waving miniature Dutch flags. Then they had all stood solemnly to sing the Dutch anthem.

After France fell, there was a time of tension and waiting, as if the Doldrums had come early, as if the people were waiting for a hurricane to dispel the tension. The Doldrums came, and with the Doldrums, hurricanes, but still the people waited. And then a German submarine sank five British tankers and the boy saw their crews die in the flaming, blackened sea. It was the end of innocence, the end of childhood, the end of his tourist fêted dream. Suddenly, his father died, and the family left the island.

It was the mother who found him, that Saturday afternoon, sitting in a deck-chair under the flamboyant with a beer can still cold in his hand. The boy, reading *Gone With The Wind*, heard the mother scream and ran out onto the porch. She shouted to him to call the hospital, to call an ambulance. But he was dead already, and when the ambulance came, the orderlies had to give most of their attention to the hysterical widow.

BECAUSE IT WAS WARTIME, the family made the flight, the burial-journey, in a blacked-out British tanker. In the hold, the father lay in a casket, on his last trip back to Texas, to San Antonio where he had been born and where he was now to lie beside his father and his father's father. The mother was in mourning on that night voyage to Maracaibo, from whence they would take the chartered plane. The boy had only cafe-au-lait linen, a compromise colour. The mother, the boy, and the sister, a grieving trio, sat in their stateroom (whose porthole was blacked to prevent light reaching the German submarines that prowled off Venezuela) and stared wordlessly at one another. They knew that their world had fallen, even as France had fallen, but they still had a home to return to, an America, a Promised Land: the South that the mother had not seen since girlhood. She talked to the children of New Orleans and of San Antonio, asking them which they would prefer. In New Orleans, they probably would have to attend a parochial school, a Catholic school run by nuns and priests. In San Antonio, they would have to go to school with Mexicans, for, although the father had left sufficient insurance, private academies would be too foolishly extravagant. They must conserve their capital and live as gracefully as possible on dwindling means. The boy thought of their future as he did of the post-Appomattox South with its shabby gentility: he could see, now, that they were all true Southerners at last.

His father's pigeons were left to the boy's uncle, who moved in to occupy his dead brother's bungalow. Every evening, during the war years, the uncle and the aunt sat out in the patio with

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their whiskey-sodas to watch, as the flamboyant purpled and the night-lilies surfaced to open as the day-lilies sank, how, from the sunset tropic west, the pigeons would return, sinking downward to darkness on extended wings.

X

"LAWRENCE," SAID HIS MOTHER to the priest, Father Corkery, the day she took the boy to Saint Cyprian's, "is an extremely—" (fishing a little here) "—*individual* boy, but I think you will find him intelligent and easy to teach, at least," she swept on, while he squirmed under Father Corkery's squint-eyed gaze, the eyes diamond lozenges in the squash-warty face, weighing and coolly summing up, you could see, *Another shirred-and-coddled aesthete,* "all his teachers have said so, and he has headed his class since kindergarten, so if you are interested in scholarship at Saint Cyprian's, you should find it in him."

Father Corkery's voice took up its rusty burden of public-relationship, "Well, of course, Mrs. Braun, we of Saint Cyprian's are interested in the Scholar, but we believe too in the All-Round Boy, in the Athlete as well as the Scholar, and we like to think that that is what we turn out, not neglecting the Spiritual Side," which, his tone plainly indicated, had been neglected here.

And the boy saw his name, Lawrence Braun, entered onto a special manila folder, the dossier of his impending career at Saint Cyprian's, a school he was attending through the generosity of the grandfather, who had come through with a school "allotment" for the children. Beatrice was going to Our Lady of the Cave. They were both to be boarders, only special students who would not have to take Religion, for the grandfather who was severely lapsed had put his foot down there. And the French-Irish grandmother, who was now a Theosopho-Spiritualist amateur medium (sponsoring, in her trumpet-trances, various penurious native-American types, Indian Redwing Guides, speaking spaciously of spirit-levels where the paradise primroses non-existed), felt that the children should be allowed to choose when they came of age, and not be "infected with Dogma" in their impressionable yo-yo years.

THE GRANDMOTHER FLEW UP from Caracas, in fact, in install the children officially, facing down Father Corkery in her grenadier intrepidity, her fifty-two summers of rose-blooming flesh bound into whalebone, the South African quartzes sleeping on her slow queen-fingers but waking to glitter in odd moments of light, saying to the baffled nun whom she called Superior Mother that there was nothing like a convent for bringing out the worldliness in young women, and making light skirmishing allusions to the Abbé de Brantôme. "Sugar, it's a mausoleum," she said to Beatrice as they drove away from Our Lady of the Cave, "but they're often the best," she finished mysteriously, not specifying for just what.

Saint Cyprian's the boy felt (and said, in his letters home) was "a smouldering little abyss of mediocrity," except for a few kindred spirits (religious adolescents with a cultivated neo-Jansenist morbidity), with the sad bell going for chapel, the beige-soup boiled-potato lunches, the hoodlum hearties scuffling in the corridors, the scholastics in clusters in their soilured gowns, and Father Corkery floating in bromidic brouhaha over it all.

"*Chère Maman,*" he wrote to Susan, his Spanish-Spider script webbing the ragweed bond and splashing his generous punctuation in Rorschach-iniquitous blobs, Turneresques of red ink, "Imagine a linoleum desert, a community of desiccate entities institutionalized to the *n*th degree and which has never forgotten the-harp-that-once-through-Tara's-halls resounded in redolent glory, where they yodel the pigs into the cabbage-patches at sundown, and the afternoon owls sit declining their Vergil from the branches of learning till the very leaves slip away, sighing. *Père Corkscrew est un ane* (I'm sure they censor the letters) and his minions are more like onions. Speaking of onions, the stuff they feed us! Harridan Stew with nameless unleavened lumps bubbling up from the ichthyological Ember-Day deeps. Ragamuffin Ragout (without the muffin) for Feast Days, with Congealed-Bridesmaid desserts." The letters ran on thus, with surrealist non-sequiturs, so that Susan, as she sat in her room in Jacob's house where she was staying until "the old stone horror" on the ranch was re-vamped, felt dispirited by the inspissated hysteria of the letters.

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Beatrice had it better, according to the boy, although *she* had to suffer all those Sisters with "the Spellman-sad *Noli-me-tangere* moons of their faces beaming disinterestedly on the lovable idiocies of the world," and who, in their "windmill wimples" were always conducting "spelling-bee Rosary-contests," buzzing through their beads with their save-a-second proficiency.

AFTER THE FIRST MONTH, Lawrence did not see Beatrice very often. Both children were quickly absorbed—sucked—into the institutional life. They made friends slowly; they almost forgot the ranch. After a while, even Lawrence's letters to Susan came less frequently.

Susan herself was busy at the ranch where, although the barns and equipment had been kept up, the house—for the former owner was a widower, a slow-witted Lutheran—had slid down the primrose perdition path. Susan went to work. The weathered eyelids of the storm-shutters were soon sportily mascaraed with fresh paint, a leek green, so that they leered at you through the live-oaks. The windows were re-leaded, the lightning rods readjusted, the stone walls blasted quarry-clean with sand, the cherry-wood interiors rubbed down to a dull glow, "the spinster polish of antiquity." The voile wings of curtains clouded the windows, the old spongy porch was made firm to the step with new oak, for Susan was as handy with hammer-and-nails as she was quick with the sewing basket. This ability had always amazed Lawrence. Back in the Islands, he could not even screw a light-globe correctly into its socket; he used to do everything exactly backward until he learned the trick: *Go opposite to your first impulse*. Lawrence's lack of practicality had worried Susan, but he had always said, "But, Mother, how do you expect me to do things when you do everything so beautifully for yourself?" and who had said, when he came up with Beatrice at Thanksgiving, "I declare, Mother, I never saw a man who could carpenter as well as you," and went on to say that if she had lived in "dynastic Egypt" they would have had her to do the Pyramids.

THE CHILDREN CAME UP on the train for the "Roosevelt Thanksgiving," and Jacob picked them up at the yolk-yellow station, for they were all to have dinner out on the ranch, where Aunt Lolly and Mother already were. The Fleetwood sang round curves as they rose in the foothills. Looking back, they could see a mountain with a Cross on it turning its sun-dial shadow over the valley town. The river snaked in the clear November sun, the stone bridges had a sugar-cube glitter. They could not make out Jacob's town house, but they could see the soaring gilt steeple of the Catholic Church, flashing for miles like the sword of a seraph. They passed a granite quarry, molasses stills and an abandoned cotton gin, a rusted shell left over from the big cotton days in the palmier part of the century. It loomed in the white afternoon, a stranded whale on the grassy acorn-strewn slopes.

After dinner was over and the women were doing the dishes (Beatrice joining in, but only with the drying, because she was afraid to ruin the nail polish that she had boldly applied when, freed from the nuns, she was whirling northward on the train) and Jacob was snoozing by the fire, Lawrence walked outside in the garden, winter-stilled, through the gate, up the dusking hill to a promontory where he could see, across the valley, the lights of farms winking, "ironic points of light."

A cold wind blew, a wind as cold as the stream of Time and History which bears in its fluxions all the living and all the dead. And Night descending, tilting in the air, bore faintly to him, far-off, the whir of pigeons on extended wings, and the phalanx and legion of the winds as they arise and circle over all the earth.

XI

THERE WERE VERY GREAT WINDS over all the earth, the young man murmured to himself, and saw, through the prism of Perse, the calcium terraces declining of his island and the terraces of the bitter aloes.

It was a hot Washington summer, and he walked slowly through the statued parks, past the political hotels with their awnings and caryatids, towards Dupont Circle. It was a Sunday and he had

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just come from a late Mass, an experiment, since he was not yet a Catholic and wondered if he had the capacity ever to become one. All the previous night, in his dreams, he had battled with many mocking ghosts—Péguy, Psichari, Bloy, Bernanos—and he believed that if he were to run into Maritain, whose lectures he had attended at the Mellon Gallery, he would sink on his knees right on the pavement and make the Sign of the Cross. He stared westward toward Georgetown and thought how, inexorably, like the march of doom in a Racinian tragedy, American intellectuals were sinking into the clutches of Rome. Half the poets were already there. Was it a true religious renascence or only one more sign of the timidity of the Age, the conformism settling over America and signalling its decline, as the Ovidian rigidity in verse had sounded the death-knell of Augustan elegant Rome?

He continued up Connecticut Avenue, past the small smart shops, circling the Dupont fountain, then into a French restaurant. He knew he was spending too much money, every penny he earned, in fact, on restaurants and wines, on concerts and taxis, on books in seven languages, but he could counter every argument for austerity with mellifluous Latin passages on mutability and, of course, the whole *Ubi Sunt* convention. Seize the Day! Seize the Night!

Your wine? the waiter inquired.

Chablis.

It was the perfect wine for summer, for the blazing boulevards of Washington. He lifted the glass, sipping the chill crisp Chablis. The plate-glass of the restaurant held, in mirrored iridescence, an avenue of glittering cars, the leg of a statue, and a woman selling flowers: the scene might as well be San Francisco or Mexico, D.F. He sighed, staring around the restaurant, but he saw no-one he knew. Furtively, he took out a Penguin *Pope* and began reading it. Execrable manners, of course, and he thoroughly disapproved of students who read in restaurants, but he had no-one to converse with and Pope was unfailingly civilized. Better Pope than that huge woman in purple at the next table: gloveless, tobacco-stained fingers; green eye-shadow mottling lids that were like nothing on earth except the corrugated steel-blinds pulled down nightly on the Avenida Madero; an astonishing demodée hat (surely not a Leghorn?) throwing half her face in shadow; a voice like a Jamaica Negress imitating Lady Mendl. Nothing so true as what you once let fall: most women have no character at all. But when he heard her say, "Aruba," he shifted his attention entirely from Pope to her.

They were finishing their coffee, and now Lily Langtry (as the young man had irreverently dubbed her) plunged for the check: "My treat my dear, I'm on vacation, don't have to watch my budget . . ." The young man could have spoken to her then, could have said, "Pardon me, but aren't you Mrs. ——?," could have seen her eyes widen and heard her first hesitant, "Why, ye-es," and then, when he had named his parents, her succeeding, "Well, I *dee*-clare!" He preferred to let her go on with her friend, to let her sashay out into the Washington wilderness, into what he liked to call "our little circus of nerves."

But, when he lifted his teacup (for he still drank tea, his expatriate legacy), he saw, in his mind's eye, a little boy, herringbone-thin, lift, under the bougainvillea-banked trellises and the flowering acacias, another teacup to his mother; heard the whir of pigeon-wings sweep the flamboyant while the orange flowers fell . . .

. . . He walked from the hearse-high Packard, past the lignum vitae trees, with the sea-grapes, uvas, sticky in one hand, the other held to his mother's hand. And, as from the gold chalice the transubstantiated wine might fall to the priest's tongue in a perishable splash, there oozed in droplets, glittering, glinting, from the cut chunky leaves stacked like starfish in resinous black wooden troughs on the caliche arid hillside, the imperishable essence, black, of the bitter aloes.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Down There on a Visit. By Christopher Isherwood. New York: Simon and Schuster. 318 pp. $4.75.

To this book, to the Christopher Isherwood books in general, we may apply the lines of Ezra Pound: ". . . the case presents/No adjunct to the Muses' diadem." The Isherwood failure is an instructive one, though, almost a paradigm. If we learn the inflections for Isherwood, we will be able to conjugate Aldous Huxley, Stephen Spender, C. Day Lewis and, to some extent, that more irregular and fascinating verb, W. H. Auden. But let us begin with the paradigm.

It is all based on E. M. Forster, the Stendhal of Bloomsbury. Isherwood read some of the Forster novels at Cambridge and became enthusiastic over their attack on the traditional British pieties. Forster disliked what he regarded as the snobberies of school, family, and religion. These he was prone to attack as "suburban," a favored Forster pejorative. Forster also disliked what he regarded as the inflated prose of the traditional English novel and its fondness for the big dramatic scene. In his own books he developed an elaborately understated prose, beside which that of Rose Macaulay seems virile, and a technique of deliberately "throwing away" big scenes, a practice he can afford less frequently than he has imagined. All of these things Isherwood took over from Forster. They are there, along with echoes of Virginia Woolf and James Joyce, in *All the Conspirators* (1928), Isherwood's first novel. It is the standard first novel about the standard sensitive young man who wishes "to write and paint." He is balked, however, by his wicked mother, who wishes him to remain at his drab office job. Wicked mothers appear extensively in the early Isherwood novels: it is hard to mistake them, for they are likely to be called "Mummie" or, sometimes, "Mumsy." They are ambitious for their offspring, plotting to marry their daughters off to members of "the Poshocracy" and their sons to jobs "with prospects." These mothers are strong figures and masterful conspirators. The hero of *All the Conspirators* circumvents his with a tricky bit of Forsterian strategy: he has a series of nervous breakdowns, thus forcing the mother to permit him to stay at home and "write and paint." *The Memorial*, which was published in 1934 by the fashionable Hogarth Press of Virginia and Leonard Woolf, covers much the same ground. Isherwood has described it as "a potted epic," *War and Peace* carved on a cherry-stone. The sensitive young hero of this one has managed to move out of his mother's house, to throw up a promising career at Cambridge, and involve himself in what, I am afraid, must be called "social action." He thus manages to escape family, school, class, and religion—all the inhibiting pieties of his mother's generation. E. M. Forster would approve. *The Memorial* also has Isherwood's first studies of sexual inversion, a subject that becomes increasingly prominent in his later books and on which he is prone to become evangelical.

It is, of course, impossible to discuss Christopher Isherwood without mentioning Auden and the Auden Group of the 1930's. The Group was got together by Auden almost in the way a prime minister assembles a cabinet, Isherwood was to be The Novelist. Certain minor ministries were assigned to Stephen Spender and C. Day Lewis though it must be said these funtionaries took their duties very seriously. The announced program of this cabinet was anti-fascist and anti-bourgeois, also pro-Marx and pro-Freud. Large promises were made, but accomplishment was slight and looks even slighter in the perspective of time. There was Stephen Spender, for example. A poem by Stephen Spender is not so much a poem as "a good cry" on this fashionable subject or that. There was C. Day Lewis who gave to the language its most bathetic line: "Why, when I meet a Communist, do I feel small?" There was, in general, a good deal of parlor Marxism and a lot of aggressive posturing. From it all, Auden and Louis MacNeice emerge best because they had comic sense. And Auden emerges best of all because there is a bite, a hardness, a rational handsomeness in his poems that is absent in the work of Spender, C. Day Lewis, and Isherwood. The difference is largely due, in Isherwood's case, to his attachment to the wanly donnish Bloomsbury Liberalism of E. M. Forster.

Isherwood lived in Berlin from 1929 to 1933 and out of this experience mined his best-known book, *The Berlin Stories*. It is made up of novelettes, the form in which he has done his best writing. The most durable of these stories is the one dealing with Arthur Norris, "the last of the Gentlemen-Adventurers," and a figure of considerable raffish charm. There is an annoying undertone in the story, though: one seems to hear the author saying, "Look, I'm writing about a boot-fetishist, and I'm not even shocked. Amn't I tolerant!" *Goodbye to Berlin*, another of these novelettes, is even worse in this respect. Sally Bowles, the heroine, is too much the standard Romantic Whore, the familiar one who under a rough exterior hides a psyche of purest gold. Symptomatically, the story was made into a hit play, *I Am a Camera*. In the Isherwood stories, women are mostly "bad." Unless they are nymphomaniacs or whores, in which case they are "good." It is a typical Romantic sentimentality. Nor is there any need to take very

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seriously the claim often made for the political virtue of *The Berlin Stories:* that they are anti-fascist. Their supposed anti-fascism is the creation of sympathetic critics. Isherwood himself acknowledges as much in *Prater Violet*. The other Isherwood books of the 30's can be safely hurried over. There was a series of verse plays on which he collaborated with Auden, mostly murky, largely lifted from Bertolt Brecht, and shrilly anti-fascist. In 1938, Isherwood wrote a fictionalized autobiography, *Lions and Shadows*. The vividest pages in it are given over to Hugh Weston (Wystan Hugh Auden), and the volume is of interest today chiefly to people researching that poet. In 1939, Auden and Isherwood collaborated on a book about their trip to China, *Journey to a War*. It is dedicated, with a bad Auden poem, to E. M. Forster and is a plea for a militant crusade against fascism.

In 1939, Isherwood came to America. Since then, he has been living in Southern California, writing for the movies, and making wonderful progress in the spiritual life. He has been successively, and is now simultaneously, a pacifist, a Quaker, and a Yoga adept. In 1945, he wrote his best book, *Prater Violet*. In it he returned to the terrain of the 30's to tell the story of a movie that he worked on with the Austrian director Berthol Viertel, who appears as Bergmann. It is again the novelette and by all odds the best-constructed of the Isherwood books. As the European artist and intellectual, Bergmann is able to provide an adult and tartly ironic continental view of the spoiled British social pets, like Isherwood, who so hugely enjoyed playing at Marxism and rebellion but who remained "Etonian Oedipuses" firmly wed to Mother. *Prater Violet* is the one Isherwood book in which self-irony has any bite at all. Usually, Isherwood's self-irony is exceedingly self-indulgent: he permits himself to be stoned with cornflakes.

It will be mostly a kindness to pass quickly over Isherwood's recent books. There have been translations of things named *Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali* and *Shankara's Crest-Jewel of Discrimination*. Also of the *Bhagavad-Gita* and of Baudelaire's *Intimate Journals*. There has been *The Condor and the Cows*, a travel book about South America. There has been *Vedanta for the Western World* (1945) which Isherwood edited and to which he contributed essays. (Aldous Huxley also has essays in this volume, and there is the amusing intelligence that some of these were later taken over whole and dumped down in his novel, *Time Must Have a Stop.)* Lastly, there has been an Isherwood novel, *The World in the Evening* (1954), a prolonged flirtation with Quakerism in thickened prose.

We now come to the end of the Isherwood paradigm, the familiar one in British literary history of the spoiled social pet. With Byron, it was played out epically large. With Oscar Wilde, it had become tragicomedy. With Christopher Isherwood, it is melodrama, cheap melodrama. It is, as Wyndham Lewis might have said, the melodrama of *The Girl Who Took the Wrong Turning*. After years of ever-modish irreverence, Isherwood has come in the last act to the "healing gush of tears." The lashes of the author of *World in the Evening* were already misted over. In *Down There on a Visit*, Isherwood clasps the Yoga of Gerald Heard in exceedingly damp embrace.

Down There on a Visit is organized in four episodes, each of which provides a glimpse of the author growing toward The Light. The first episode, "Mr. Lancaster," shows him at twenty-three visiting a middle-aged cousin in Germany. This cousin is in the habit of quoting from the Greeks and from Tennyson. Isherwood finds him a great bore and treats him insolently. It is the Forsterian note: traditional values are "suburban" and must be rejected. (We are told that the cousin, Mr. Lancaster, is sexually impotent and he eventually dies a suicide. You see how symbolic Isherwood can be when he would be *very* fine.)

The next episode, "Ambrose," takes place five years later on an island off the coast of Greece. Ambrose is a homosexual whom Isherwood had known at Cambridge, but he has left Cambridge and England because a group of college "hearties" had gone into his rooms and smashed up the elegant furnishings. Even an egg-cup of which he had been especially fond. He has become an anarchist because of his hatred of this kind of British ruling-class "beastliness" and has gone to the isles of Greece to buy one. There he wishes to found an ideal community where imaginative values will prevail. Isherwood becomes enthusiastic about Ambrose and about this venture for a time but soon sees that it is escapist and unreal. The attempt to replace traditional values with aesthetic ones has failed.

The third episode, "Waldemar," is the most cluttered in the book. It begins in August, 1938 and deals mainly with a young German friend of the author. Waldemar represents the German experience of the 30's. Made rootless by inflation and political chaos, he has moved over most of the European continent cutting an exceedingly wide sexual swath. Isherwood approves of this all right, except for one thing: Waldemar enjoys the sadistic sexual attentions of another young German who has been a corporal in the army. All this looks exceedingly like a symbol: Waldemar is a crypto-Nazi. Isher-

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wood shakes his head sadly over this because we all know what a resolute anti-fascist he is. The reader tenses: he thinks he sees a moral judgment coming. Waldemar goes back to Germany to join the army. Isherwood decides he must be a pacifist in the coming war, because of his great human affection for Waldemar. This is extremely curious logic from a co-author of *Journey to a War*. There is a burst of similar logic in Isherwood's tribute to E. M. Forster in the same section of the novel: "He and his books and what they stand for are all that is truly worth saving from Hitler; and the vast majority of people on this island aren't even aware that he exists." The petulance of this passage is ironic in light of the fact that any *saving* that was done got done by people whose admiration of Forster was much more temperate than that of Christopher Isherwood.

The climactic episode of the novel, "Paul," takes place in Hollywood between 1940 and 1953. There, presumably while he was not rolling bandages for the War Effort, Isherwood wrote for the movies and embraced Quakerism and Yoga. "Paul" is a kind of spiritual diary Isherwood learns his Yoga at the knees of a shepherd named Augustus Parr, who sounds very much like Gerald Heard. The passages that deal with his spiritual progress are extremely funny. There is the high, puling whine, for example, of the one in which we are told that Augustus Parr in "some utterly mysterious indirect manner" is "keeping us spiritually alive through this wartime" and is one of the "only people in America whose jobs could *really* be called essential. . . . It was awe-inspiring to think this. I told myself that I mustn't ever forget it in the midst of the activity ahead." Adding greatly to the comedy, there is Paul himself, Isherwood's fellow pilgrim. Paul is "the most expensive male prostitute in the world." But in Isherwood, whores are always "good," and Paul is "good." He also takes cocaine and drinks far too much. In an Isherwood novel, Paul is clearly marked out for sanctity. And indeed he soon takes up Yoga, reforms marvelously, and dies practically *in odore suavitatis*. I had the feeling I was listening to a "Fantasy on an Air by Jack Kerouac." But it was only Isherwood after all and predictable Isherwood at that. As Auden was shrewd enough to see, a spectacularly irrational conversion had long been in the offing for Isherwood. It has come and has proved an even greater bore than all the years of fashionable naughtiness.

The Isherwood story is the familiar one in our time of the Eagle Scout who tries to be Baudelaire. To be Baudelaire, as Eliot pointed out, requires a capacity for evil. Isherwood has only succeeded in being naughty. To be Baudelaire also requires capacity for good. Isherwood remains just an Eagle Scout.

—Warren Coffey

A Sad Heart At The Supermarket. By Randall Jarrell. New York: Atheneum. 211 pp. $4.50.

"Proust's grandmother was not a poet or a prose-writer, but she read Madame de Sévigné properly. To be, as she was, a reader, is a lofty and no longer common fate." This is the witty and melancholy burden of this bewitchingly written collection of "essays and fables" by the fabled essayist and great poet, Randall Jarrell. He dispenses his jokes more sparingly than he did in *Poetry and the Age* (1953), but he expands spiritedly such key essays of that volume as "The Obscurity of the Poet" and "The Age of Criticism." Robert Lowell believes that these new essays are Jarrell's own *Culture and Anarchy*. Yet if they lack (and they do) Matthew Arnold's magisterial brilliance and top-lofty tone, they have an endearing idiomatic ease. Jarrell lacks alarmingly the scholarship, the wide reading, the polyglot mandarin culture, as well as the crystalline patrician style of Lytton Strachey and Edmund Wilson (the best essayists of this age), but he makes, in his colloquial manner, amusing annotations on their more impressive achievement. Yet just as Wilson was occasionally guilty of casting garlands upon third-rate or fifth-rate women poets (Teasdale, Taggard), so Jarrell can pour out impulsive praise upon a predictably bad Cumberland Scotch Presbyterian poetess named Eleanor Ross Taylor, whose best poem, quoted remorselessly in full by Jarrell, resembles one of Topsy's discarded worksheets. It would indeed take a "real reader," some ideal insomniac who had cut his teeth on Pablum labels, to read through Mrs. Taylor. This essay, by bad arrangement the concluding one in his book, suggests that Jarrell's own standards are sometimes as dangerously relaxed as those he complains about.

For he complains, as fabulists have always done, that things were better once: "Queen Victoria in a D. C. 7 would be Queen Victoria still—I can hear her saying to the stewardess: 'We do not wish dramamine'; but a Queen Victoria who listened every day to *John's Other Wife*, *Portia Faces Life*, and *Just Plain Bill*—that wouldn't be Queen Victoria at all!" (Yet Strachey makes it plain that though she kept Tennyson as her pet from another planet, so to speak, Queen Victoria really thrilled to someone like Charlotte M. Yonge or Mrs. Humphrey Ward, that Fannie Hurst of the Nineteenth Century.) But the cultural nightmare inevitably descends upon Randall Jarrell, and he envisions Victoria and Albert: "sitting before the television set, staring into it, silent; and inside the set, there are Victoria and Albert, staring into the television camera, silent, and the master of ceremonies is saying to them: 'No, I think you will find that *Bismarck* is the capital of North Dakota!'" It is the arts of reading and writing, especially, which suffer in an age which has witnessed a devaluation of all values. And Jarrell inveighs feelingly against those Fadiman-esque, Maughamesque, Schorer-

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esque, Trillingesque cultural commissars who are always giving us "Revised Standard Versions of books, in their simplified, televised form."

The visual, plastic, utilitarian, or performing arts are better off. "The president of a paint factory goes home, sits down by his fireplace—it *looks* like a chromium aquarium set into the wall by a wall-safe company that has branched out into interior decorating, but there is a log burning in it, he calls it a fireplace, let's call it a fireplace too—the president sits down, folds his hands on his stomach, and stares relishingly at two paintings by Jackson Pollock that he has hung on the wall opposite him. He feels at home with them; in fact, as he looks at them he not only feels at home, he feels as if he were back at the paint factory. . . . This president's minor executives may not be willing to hang a Kandinsky in the house, but they will wear one, if you make it into a sport shirt or a pair of swimming-trunks; and if you make it into a sofa, they will lie on it. They and their wives and children will sit on a porcupine, if you first exhibit it at the Museum of Modern Art and say that it is a chair. In fact, there is nothing, nothing in the whole world that someone won't buy and sit in if you tell him that it is a chair: the great new art form of our age, the one that will take anything we put in it, is the chair. If Hieronymus Bosch, if Christian Morgenstern, if the Marquis de Sade were living at this hour, what chairs they would be designing!"

The title essay has far more bitter observations: "The act of buying something is at the root of our world; if anyone wishes to paint the genesis of things in our society, he will paint a picture of God holding out to Adam a check-book or credit card or Charge-A-Plate;" "Our culture is essentially periodical: we believe that all that is deserves to perish and to have something else put in its place." It is a very sad heart that is aired at the supermarket.

Randall Jarrell has read the great French moralists and aphorists from La Rochefoucauld and Saint Simon to Proust and Malraux, and "mesmeric echoes" of them sound faintly through the *feuilleton* mannerisms of his prose. Jarrell again burns incense to Proust ("that miraculous writer and great critic"), whom he had called in the opening essay of his 1953 collection, "the greatest of the writers of this century," and to Proust's extraordinary, lately-discovered manuscript, *Contre Sainte-Beuve*. And, in the best essay in his book, Jarrell pays tribute—rather grudging tribute—to Malraux. He complains of Malraux's nervous histrionics, his grandiose rhetoric, his "conventionally theatrical" sentiments, his "more-than-Tyrian purple," togaed, Jeanne d'Arc, ultra-Péguy, *La-France-c'est-moi* moments that he shares with that other Grave Eminence, Charles De Gaulle. Jarrell quotes a number of Malraux's rhetorical phrases about "blood and doom-fraught stars . . . blood and fate-fraught stars . . . the menaces of doom-fraught stars," and then says about them, in the most amusing sentence in his book, "Who would have thought that those old stars had so much doom in them?" Amusing; yes. But if one turns from this Lady Parvula de Panzoust side of Jarrell to one of Malraux's great echoing periods, the jest is swept away, a splinter in the torrent of rhetoric: "Gazing with eyes still misted with fears of hell, above that miraculously apt fracture which makes her face the very effigy of Gothic death, the Saint Elizabeth of Bamberg seems to contemplate her 'prototype' of Rheims across an abyss of time." Jarrell finds this sentence "a work of art" (surely, a phrase more conventional than anything in Malraux), and then he goes on to complain about it for several pages. And he eases us out of Malraux's presence by saying that Malraux "still believes that Schumann composed to the smell of rotten apples, but that you can't smell them in his music. Poor Schiller! I'd as soon see Eve, Newton, and Gregor Samsa deprived of their apples." The Malraux essay and the Kipling essay both suffer by comparison with Edmund Wilson's earlier and more percipient essays on those men.

Despite the interest of his essays, it is the poet in Jarrell who really matters. And since our readers—addicted to "Fulton Oursler and Fulton Sheen"—may not know his poems the way they know Francis Thompson's, it may be appropriate to glance at his career.

Randall Jarrell was born in Nashville in 1914, went to Vanderbilt University, became a teacher of English, served in the Air Force during World War II, went back to teaching after the war, helped to edit *The Nation*, served as Poetry Consultant to the Library of Congress, and is now Professor of English at the Woman's College of the University of North Carolina. His earlier essays, *Poetry and the Age* (1953), have been widely read by the livelier college students, and his mordantly hilarious *roman-à-clef* of life at Sarah Lawrence, *Pictures From An Institution* (1954), has its clique of admirers; these two books established Randall Jarrell as a "wit." But his finest books, the six volumes of poetry ranging from *Blood For A Stranger* (1942) to *The Woman At The Washington Zoo* (1960), are far different and far more profound; their astringently elegiac quality has been analyzed at length by Robert Lowell, Parker Tyler, and Sister M. Bernetta Quinn.

His first book, *Blood For A Stranger* (1942), offers Audenesque variations on a theme by Tate; only its "period" aspects interest us today. The next two volumes, *Little Friend, Little Friend* (1945) and *Losses* (1948), contain the war poems, Jarrell's greatest work, which formed Part Two of his *Selected Poems* (1955); the best of the war poems are: *Eighth Air Force; The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner; Losses; Siegfried; Pilots, Man Your Planes; Burning the Letters; Second Air Force; The Rising Sun.* Many of

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these are dramatic poems or monologues, such as *Burning the Letters* (Jarrell's masterpiece), and stem from Browning, Frost, Robert Lowell, as well as from Wilfred Owen; but the accent throughout is unmistakably Jarrell's. After 1948, he turned to writing poems on cultural themes, and these newer poems define for me the crisis in our culture far more movingly than anything in his essays. These poems are subtler, less violent, quietly melancholy, "Germanic" (he taught for a while at Salzburg), and have at times an inconclusive, wistful note; the best of them are: *A Girl in a Library; Seele im Raum; A Game At Salzburg; An English Garden in Austria; The Märchen; Hohensalzburg; The Place of Death; The Woman at the Washington Zoo;* and *The End of the Rainbow*. It is for these poems and the great war-poems of 1942-1948 that readers of the future will most value Randall Jarrell. This is not to scant the many felicities of his prose; it is simply to insist upon his greater achievement as a poet: Randall Jarrell is, with Robert Lowell and John Berryman, one of the three or four greatest American poets to emerge since 1940.

For if Jarrell could never write essays as magnificent as Lytton Strachey's or Edmund Wilson's, he can write poems that are better than theirs. There remain his poems, unread, unvalued except by "a wife, a nun, a ghost or two," but nevertheless waiting, always waiting, for the right reader. "It is perhaps always fatal not to be a poet," remarked Lytton Strachey; but Randall Jarrell tells us feelingly about the fatality of being a poet in an age which no longer values poetry. Randall Jarrell's curious book comes out of the Silent Fifties with their beatnik-cum-Henry Luce perversion of values—out of the tranquillized idiocy of the Eisenhower years—on which it makes its pungent, desolating, and valuable comment.

—Hieronymo Kreuz

Salinger. Edited by Henry Anatole Grunwald. New York: Harper. 287 pp. $4.95.

"*He demands of his readers nothing in the way of literacy or political interest (in my time, college bull sessions raged over* Doctor Faustus; *but that meant having heard of Hitler or Nietzsche or being dimly aware of a past writer called Goethe). Salinger flatters the very ignorance and moral shallowness of his young readers. He suggests to them that formal ignorance, political apathy and a vague* tristesse *are positive virtues. . . . There is, at the moment, a gross devaluation of standards (the Cozzens ecstasy of a few seasons back is a case in point). If criticism does not serve to distinguish what is great from what is competent, it is not carrying out its proper task. If it conspires to suggest that transcendent values are made articulate in anything quite as loose and glossy as the maunderings of Zooey, it is betraying its responsibilities. Of course, Salinger is a most skillful and original writer. Of course, he is worth discussing and praising. But not in terms appropriate to the master poets of the world, not with all the pomp and circumstance of final estimation. By all means, let us have Esmé, Daumier-Smith and all the Glasses. But let us not regard them as the house of Atreus reborn.*"

George Steiner, "The Salinger Industry."

Pope said that you could always tell a true wit, because the dunces were all leagued against him. But when the dunces are all leagued *for* him, as they are for Jerome David Salinger in this absurd *ragout* stirred up by one of the editors of *Time* magazine, one is dismayed to see Salinger changing, like a faraway princess transmogrified into the pea under her mattress, into a true bore.

There are characteristically mediocre pieces by Mizener and Hicks; there are pieces of a stunning stupidity by Ihab Hassan and Martin Green; there are measured and rewarding articles by Kazin and Geismar. But the finest statement on Salinger, a highly adverse one, is by George Steiner: "*The Salinger Industry*," which appeared first in *The Nation* and is a reminder that sane men exist.

The showpieces of the book, powerful and plunging, are of course the two essays by Leslie Fiedler, who is identified correctly by the editor as "the most fascinating critic now at work." Fiedler's essays define, in a "Dionysian" manner, Salinger's appalling limitations, much as these limitations are recognized more composedly by George Steiner in his "Apollonian" statement.

There are a few other saving pages, especially Joan Didion's truly *Vogue*-ish dishing: "*Franny and Zooey* is finally spurious, and what makes it spurious is Salinger's tendency to flatter the essential triviality within each of his readers, his predilection for giving instructions for living. What gives the book its extremely potent appeal is precisely that it is self-help copy: it emerges finally as *Positive Thinking* for the upper middle classes, as *Double Your Energy And Live Without Fatigue* for Sarah Lawrence girls."

—The Editors

The Death of Tragedy. By George Steiner. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 355 pp. $5.00.

George Steiner sets out in *The Death of Tragedy* to answer the question, Of what did tragedy die? His approach is bold and confident, as it had to be if there was to be any chance of success in so large an inquiry. He waves aside other contemporary writers on tragedy and acts as tragedy's spokesman and interpreter. There is a good deal of assertion, little sustained argument, and no notice taken of other interpretations. Mr. Steiner feels that tragedy died not, as Nietzsche thought, of suicide, but of inanition.

"To have great poets there must be great audiences too," as *Poetry* used, ever more forlornly, to re-

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mind us (a Whitman motto finally dropped in the early fifties). Much the same holds true, as Mr. Steiner sees it, for tragedy. The symbolic forms of the imagination which playwrights and audiences once shared were killed off by the familiar villains Descartes and Newton. A feverish afterglow arose in the Romantic period, and Mr. Steiner feels able to make some very high claims for Byron, if not for most other playwrights of the nineteenth century. But the widening gap between the romantics and their audience produced, on the one hand, unplayable plays, essentially lyric in mode; and on the other, plays that succeeded, like Hugo's, only because they sacrificed inner dramatic logic to theatricality. In our own day the latter current has led, he feels, to the stylized trivia of the commercial theater, while the lyric strain has grown ever thinner in plays like Yeats' that simply exclude what would reasonably be called an audience. And prospects for the future are desperate. The brutality of our life and the progressive brutalization of language have driven the tragic writer from the broad and central position he occupied in certain other societies and forced him into a too clangorous passion, an overspecialization in nuances, a radical disalliance from the world whose language he uses.

Thus, roughly, the line of the argument. The familiar story is helped along by a strong generalizing tendency and by a faculty for appreciation, though neither of these is an unmixed blessing. Mr. Steiner makes quite a point of his being what he calls an Old Critic and he is at his best, as the older critics often were, in appreciation. The remarks on *Cornélie* or on Kleist are likely to send more readers than one back to the originals. The author's talent for apt quotation no doubt arises from a real sympathy for his subject, especially the romantic and the French classical drama, which he examines more closely than the more familiar Greek and Shakespearean tragedies. He communicates appreciation suggestively, periphrastically, rather than by analysis of the new-critical kind.

At times, however, this method, which obliges the author to a continual search for suitable comparisons, leads to a passage like this: "When Victor Hugo opens *Cromwell* with the notation—

Demain, vingt-cinq juin mil six cent cinquante-sept—he shows that he is of the century of Hegel." This is possibly, just possibly, right; but it would need at best so many qualifications that it is more a nuisance than a help. Momentarily held up, we brush the point aside and proceed, only to slam against the very next sentence: "In both Shakespeare and Racine there is a timelessness; and where there is time, it is not chronology." End of paragraph. If a reader tries to refine this distinction, to recall perhaps what he can of Poulet's chapter on Racine, he is doing more than the author seems to require, for the following paragraph turns to the French translations of Shakespeare current in the Romantic period. Here the author leaves aside the suggestive method and ends with a neat, and helpful, epigram: Shakespeare was, for the French romantics, "a radical who wrote melodramas." Such quick thrusts, of which there are many, give the book an excitement and distinction.

The romantics, as has been said, occupy a large place in this book. Mr. Steiner sees them as characteristically avoiding tragedy by such a formula as this: "four acts of tragic violence and guilt . . . followed by a fifth act of redemption and innocence regained." This is of course melodrama (though one might want to query the word *tragic*). He continues, " 'Near-tragedy' is, in fact, another word for melodrama." A good deal farther on, we hear that "where the theatrical is allowed complete rule over the dramatic, we get melodrama." It is not that these two formulations, some thirty pages apart, are irreconcilable, for clearly they are not; but that, as with the periphrastic appreciations mentioned already, the focus is blurred. The first formulation seems to imply a fifth-act swerve from the developing dramatic logic, while the other seems to say that dramatic logic throughout is sacrificed to theatrical dazzle. Another pair of competing definitions of the same important term, this time both within the space of about a page, illustrates the same lack of conceptual precision in a book with a theoretical subject. "Tragedy springs from outrage; it protests at the conditions of life." Again, "Tragedy is a deliberate advance to the edge of life, where the mind must look on blackness at the risk of vertigo." It is true that at the outset Mr. Steiner observes, "When we say 'tragic drama' we know what we are talking about; not exactly, but well enough to recognize the real thing," but this comfortable diffidence is perhaps not enough if, later on, we see that definitions of tragedy are in fact being offered that are different enough from one another to force us to be more specific about what we do mean. Further, other key terms, like "melodrama," are in their turn defined by reference to "tragedy."

Nor are these central terms the only ones used with a certain looseness. What force is to be attached to "rationalize," for example, in the following passage? Mr. Steiner, noting interestingly that many romantic French "melodramas" survive in use only as opera libretti, explains that "music rationalizes and completes the elements of pure gesture and fantasy inherent in the material. Melodic lines can safely carry a great burden of absurdity." Is this after all really much different from Voltaire's blunter account of opera: "What is too stupid to be said, is sung"? Or just how seriously are we to take "pretence" when Mr. Steiner asserts that "in tragedy it is the individual instance of injustice that infirms the general pretence of order. One Hamlet is enough to convict a state of rottenness."

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What looks like a distinction basic to the book's argument is stated in the first four pages. Tragedy is said to be alien to the Judaic vision, which "sees in disaster a specific moral fault or failure of understanding." The second alternative sounds disquietingly like what many scholars now think of as *hamartia*. But Mr. Steiner denies a significant relation between personal error and tragic disaster in the Greek view, in which "necessity is blind and man's encounter with it shall rob him of his eyes, whether it be in Thebes or in Gaza." Both these positions are arguable, but neither is argued; they remain at the level of assertion. The author does not seem to pay them much heed at some crucial points in the development of his thesis. Does the romantic avoidance of tragedy in melodrama have a connection with the Judaic outlook to which tragedy is alien? The problem is not raised in the book. Again we hear, much later on, "the *Oresteia* and *Hamlet* belonged together, in the same sphere of tragedy." This is Lessing's view, accepted by Mr. Steiner. But just how is *Hamlet* related to the Greek vision as he has expounded it? This question too is not raised.

As a contribution to understanding "the death of tragedy," the book does not make out a serious, or even consistent, case. Its value is the value of its individual *aperçus* and appreciations.

—John B. Gleason

The Great Wave and Other Stories, by Mary Lavin. New York; Macmillan; 287 pp.; $3.50.

It tells a great deal about the eleven stories in this book when it is stated that seven of them were originally published in *The New Yorker*, and all of them might have been. The ascendancy of *New Yorker* stories in the minds of anthologists and teachers of creative writing has provoked a certain amount of counterreaction, but to no special avail. The magazine's critics talk of self-conscious craftsmanship which results in psuedo-nonchalant artifice rather than permanent, living art. They voice suspicions that many of its stories are actually sketches, anecdotes strewn with "symbols" to give them a sophisticated air, and provided with inconclusive endings which are as ritualistic as any stereotype of earlier fiction.

Clearly, *The New Yorker's* worst stories are often irritating because they attempt to capitalize on a manner which does not do as much for thin talent as its proponents seem to think. But there are moments when even the obviously great talent of Mary Lavin is not displayed to advantage by writing under *The New Yorker's* spell. And at this point another question suggests itself: has she become so beguiled by the artifice of the short story that we are losing good novels as a result? This is her fourth book of short stories; she has published only one novel, *The House in Clewe Street* (1945).

But the real problem is not whether *The New Yorker* is vulnerable but where the short story writer can turn without finding himself in the company of Stevenson, Galsworthy, or (worse still) O. Henry. When all is said, *The New Yorker* has still done more than any other publication to keep the short story from being a mere holdover of an essentially Victorian art. It may well be called a distinction gained by default, but where do those of us who are dissatisfied with the status of the modern short story think it ought to go? It is a drastically limited field, yet everyone is understandably reluctant to suggest that its limits have been reached. Still there is no doubt that most collections of short stories are among the poorest sellers in the entire publishing field, and there are proportionately fewer short stories appearing in most of our literary magazines than ever before. Beginning writers turn them out because having a few stories published somewhere is supposed to increase friendly glances in the direction of one's first novel. Seasoned writers like them because they can be produced quickly for sale to slick magazines when book royalties run low. There is little here which bodes well for the future of the serious short story, at least in America.

Mary Lavin has chosen to write stories of contemporary Irish life, a field which, ever since Joyce's *Dubliners* appeared in 1914, has been exploited by such men of talent as O'Faolain, O'Connor, and O'Flaherty. Today there is no doubt that she rightfully belongs in their company. She has shown no inclination to return to her native United States nor to write about it; she evidently senses depth and richness in the provincial and poverty-stricken Irish world which offer more than enough opportunities for writing, however many others may be working in the same area.

While the settings of her stories are ostensibly contemporary, there are few details in most of them which would have prevented their happening in 1880. The world of the lower-middle and working classes has an imperviousness to current happenings which translates easily into the universal. And hers is usually a woman's world of family and children, not as sealed off as Ivy Compton-Burnett's, but extending only to the immediate neighborhood. In reading her stories we are reminded that the most exciting fact about artistic verbalization is that no matter how often words are used to express the same basic and limited situations, the result when attempted by a mature and gifted writer is always interesting and new.

The majority of her stories center about the theme of death and the special situations which death creates for the living. Sometimes the subleties are almost grotesque. In "Bridal Sheets" a fisherman's wife on a small island had provided herself with fine linens and clothes be-

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fore her wedding, but has never found quite the right occasion on which to use them. In "Secondhand" the sale of a dead mother's clothes by her two daughters provides an insight which reverses the superficial judgment which one of them has accepted about herself and her sister. Two boys engage in a childish "dare the bogeyman" attempt to view a corpse in "The Living," but an understanding of the real significance of death comes from intimations of their mother's mortality.

The title story, "The Great Wave," shows the writer's talents in largest dimension. In the opening scene (somewhat reminiscent of Balzac's "Christ in Flanders") a Bishop sits in a small boat, on his way to a Confirmation ceremony on a small, offshore island. We learn that the island is the boyhood home of the Bishop, and we are prepared for a flashback about bleak lives in a world of bleak shore and sea. What really awaits us is transcendant horror: in his boyhood the Bishop once went fishing with a seminary student, and on that day the potential might and terror of the sea found the kind of expression of which great myths are made. It is hard to forget the moment when a drowned man is raised up by a wave as if on display in a glass case, or the discovery by the two young men that a wave has deposited them on the highest point of the island, which means that all those living below. . . . Yes, Mary Lavin can move out of her family world when she wants to; and having demonstrated that she can, she chooses to bide her time.

But I mentioned earlier that I thought there are intervals when writing in a *New Yorker genre* is not to her advantage. Three of her stories, "The Mouse," "The Yellow Beret," and "Lemonade" particularly illustrate what I mean. In each of these the title of the story is used to establish a symbolic theme, and the now forewarned reader merely waits for its appearance in the tale as a signal that the pivotal turn of the story has been reached. It is surely no coincidence that these stories are the most labored; grinding machinery is not disguised by ingenious presentation. In "Lemonade," for instance, the title theme appears at carefully spaced intervals, and the reader finds himself betting when it will appear again, as if he were watching a speaker who falls into a periodically displayed mannerism. It says much for Mary Lavin that even these tales are managed with such finesse that criticism is partly offset by admiration. And the mannered gimmickry of these stories will hopefully be left behind when she moves into the larger area of the novel.

Are these stories Catholic? Yes, in the deepest and least obtrusive sense. When we remember how even Graham Greene and Evelyn Waugh sometimes introduce their Catholic themes with the subtlety of hodcarriers, we may indeed be grateful that Mary Lavin's world is one in which Catholicism permeates all things quietly and matter-of-factly. The supernatural is not directly evident in her stories, but there is always this consideration: her intensified sensitivity leads to a heightened insight into the ultimate fusion of great and small things into complex unity, and such insight surely has something in common with even the mystic's vision.

—Byron R. Bryant

Poems. By Allen Tate. New York: Scribner's. 224 pp. $5.00. (Also in Swallow paperback: $1.85.)

The more significant modern American poets may be divided into five overlapping generations: I: *The Traditionalist Generation* (Santayana, Robinson, Stickney, Frost) flourishing 1890-1916; II: *The Experimental Generation* (Eliot, Pound, Stevens, Aiken, Jeffers, Williams, Cummings, Moore) flourishing most notably 1917-1929, but still the most powerful and significant of all the generations; III: *The Reactionary Generation* (Crane, Tate, Ransom, Warren, Bishop, MacLeish, Millay, Winters) flourishing 1922-1935; IV: *The Synthesizing Generation* (Auden, Lowell, Jarrell,Berryman,Shapiro,Schwartz, Fitzgerald, Kunitz, Roethke) flourishing 1935-1960, the largest group with many skilled adherents but less original than either the *Experimental* or the *Reactionary* poets, whose styles they amalgamated into a sort of "synthesis"; and, finally, V: *The Newer Poets* (Antoninus, Duncan, and Schevill in the West; Merrill, Merwin, Hecht, etc. in the East) who are now making their reputations.

Not all of these poets, obviously, are of equal value; many are very uneven and survive in a few anthology pieces (Santayana, Stickney, Cummings, Bishop, MacLeish, Millay, Schwartz, Roethke), but all are worth reading. It is the many minor poets who make the few major poets possible. The appearance of the definitive edition of Allen Tate's *Poems* permits me to examine briefly the career of one of the finest of our modern poets.

Allen Tate was born in 1899 into a Southern family then resident in Kentucky, but originally from Virginia (the milieu of his great novel, *The Fathers*); he was educated at Vanderbilt in Nashville, where, in conjunction with John Crowe Ransom and other intellectuals, he founded the magazine *The Fugitive* in 1922. The "Fugitives" were poets of Southern background who prized intellection and irony in poetry, who were dazzled with the possibilities of "the metaphysical strategy," and who looked to T. S. Eliot as a master. The irascible and ironic young Tate, who was even then regarded as the "genius" of the group (he might be designated the Du Bellay of the Southern Pléiade), found another master among the poets of his own age: Hart Crane. In 1925, he made a trip north to New York to meet Crane, whose suicide in 1932 was an emotional factor in the later

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conversion of Tate. The atmosphere of these years is skillfully evoked by Caroline Gordon in her novel, *The Malefactors* (1956).

Tate has written, over a long and distinguished career, three very complex masterpieces of modern poetry which subsume the essential themes of his three major periods of production: the *Ode to the Confederate Dead* (1926-1936), which is the most famous, and possibly the finest, of the great tormented period which closes with *Selected Poems* (1937); the marvellous elegy *Seasons of the Soul* (1944), which defines an ethos of desolated atheism; the beautifully sustained *terza rima* meditation, *The Buried Lake* (1953), from the series of Catholic poems written soon after his conversion. From first to last, his themes are consistent and profound, so that his poetry, more than that of any other modern poet except Eliot and Auden, charts the religious journey of an intellectual.

One of the finest of his early poems is *The Cross* which Hart Crane much admired and which Yvor Winters has pronounced to be one of the great lyrics in English. The famous conclusion describes the modern intellectuals who are cut off from the community of faith: "So blind, in so severe a place/ (All life before in the black grave)/ The last alternatives they face/ Of life, without the life to save,/ Being from all salvation weaned——/ A stag charged both at heel and head:/ Who would come back is turned a fiend/ Instructed by the fiery dead." The precarious assurance of the casually ironic "from all salvation weaned" is given the lie by the hallucinated atmosphere of the context. A despairing line from *The Meaning of Death* sums up the first period's Arnoldian outlook: "We are the eyelids of defeated caves."

In the second period–represented by the volume *The Winter Sea* (1944)–the poet writes a second series of *Sonnets at Christmas* which comment on some earlier guilt-haunted sonnets. The rejection of Christianity is absolute and arrogant: "Ten years are time enough to be dismayed/ By mummy Christ, head crammed between his knees." And in the elegy for John Peale Bishop, *Seasons of the Soul*, Tate announces laconically that "the drying God above,/ Hanged in his windy steeple,/ No longer bears for us/ The living wound of love." But the most revealing passage in the poetry of this period is the closing section of *Winter Mask*: "I asked the master Yeats/ Whose great style could not tell/ Why it is man hates/ His own salvation,/ Prefers the way to hell,/ And finds his last safety/ In the self-made curse that bore/ Him toward damnation:/ The drowned undrowned by the sea,/ The sea worth living for." The language is restrained and classical, but behind its calmly-mastered terror rises the demon-driven figure of Hart Crane ("the self-made curse"). Tate's way to the Cross was near at hand. It is significant that in this same year (1944), he noted in his preface to Robert Lowell's *Land of Unlikeness*: "Christopher Dawson has shown in long historical perspective that material progress may mask social and spiritual decay. But the spiritual decay is not universal, and in a young man like Lowell, whether we like his Catholicism or not, there is at least a memory of the spiritual dignity of man, now sacrificed to mere secularization and a craving for mechanical order."

During the Second World War, he became a close friend of the Maritains; in 1950 he was received into the Roman Catholic Church. His first volume thereafter was a volume of literary and social criticism, *The Forlorn Demon* (1952), reflecting profound Catholic insights. From 1944 to his conversion in 1950, he wrote very little poetry, but his conversion afforded him an emotional release which he has lately applied to a rather Augustinian examination of his past. Three sections – *The Maimed Man, The Swimmers, The Buried Lake* – of a long (and still unfinished) poem in *terza rima* appeared in the quarterlies; *The Swimmers* and *The Buried Lake* have been included in this, the definitive edition of Tate's *Poems*.

Tate's best poems–that handful of them which will survive as well as any American poems of this age–are: *The Mediterranean;* the conclusion of *To The Lacedemonians; Ode to the Confederate Dead; Seasons of the Soul; Mother and Son; Sonnets at Christmas; Winter Mask to the Memory of W. B. Yeats; The Traveller; The Wolves; The Subway; Last Days of Alice; The Cross; Shadow and Shade;* the sonnet beginning "Not power nor the casual hand of God"; *The Swimmers; The Buried Lake.* And even the slightest of his poems – and many of the poems in the sixth section of this volume are slight – have, as Robert Lowell says, "a killing eloquence."

A killing eloquence! The profundity of his themes, the pyrotechnical brilliance of his technique yoking together classical, romantic, baroque, Gothic, symbolist, and metaphysical elements,–when these appear in conjunction with a precise, analytical mind, the result is one of the most satisfying and indispensable volumes of American poetry.

Allen Tate has been a sort of Matthew Arnold *de nos jours*: the anguished, intelligent witness. His career has been a search for order and traditional values: the Old Order of the South; Dante and Racine; formalism and the "symbolic imagination"; Roman Catholicism; Valéry's "Mediterranean" civilization. He has been beset by the loud laments of various disconsolate chimeras: the New Mind of the South; Poe and Hart Crane; romanticism and the "angelic imagination"; positivism; the "unexperienced future imagined by . . . Mr. Henry Wallace." And on his perilous way he has distilled his impressive and powerful poems –"imperishable, if Time is."

—Harry Stiehl

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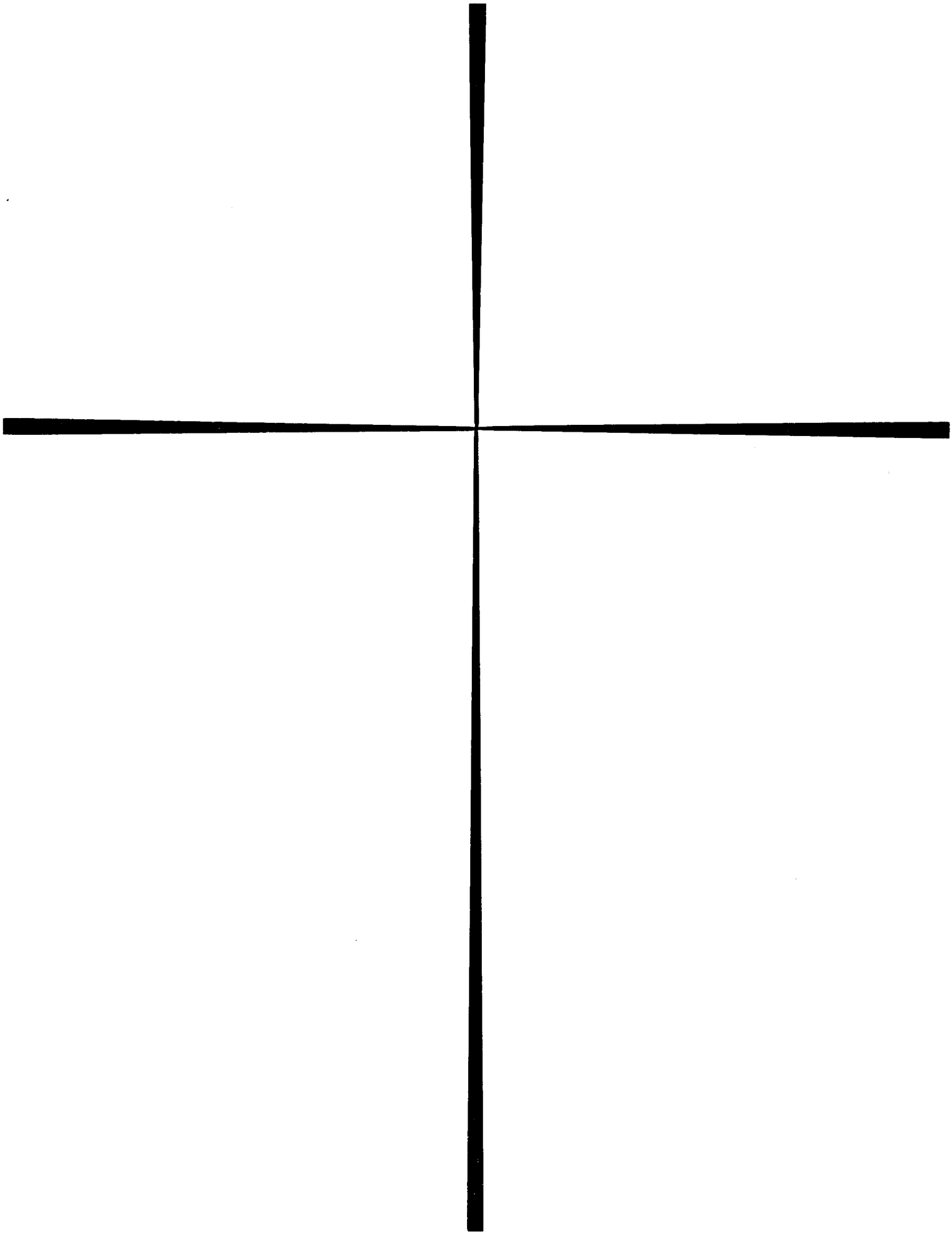

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